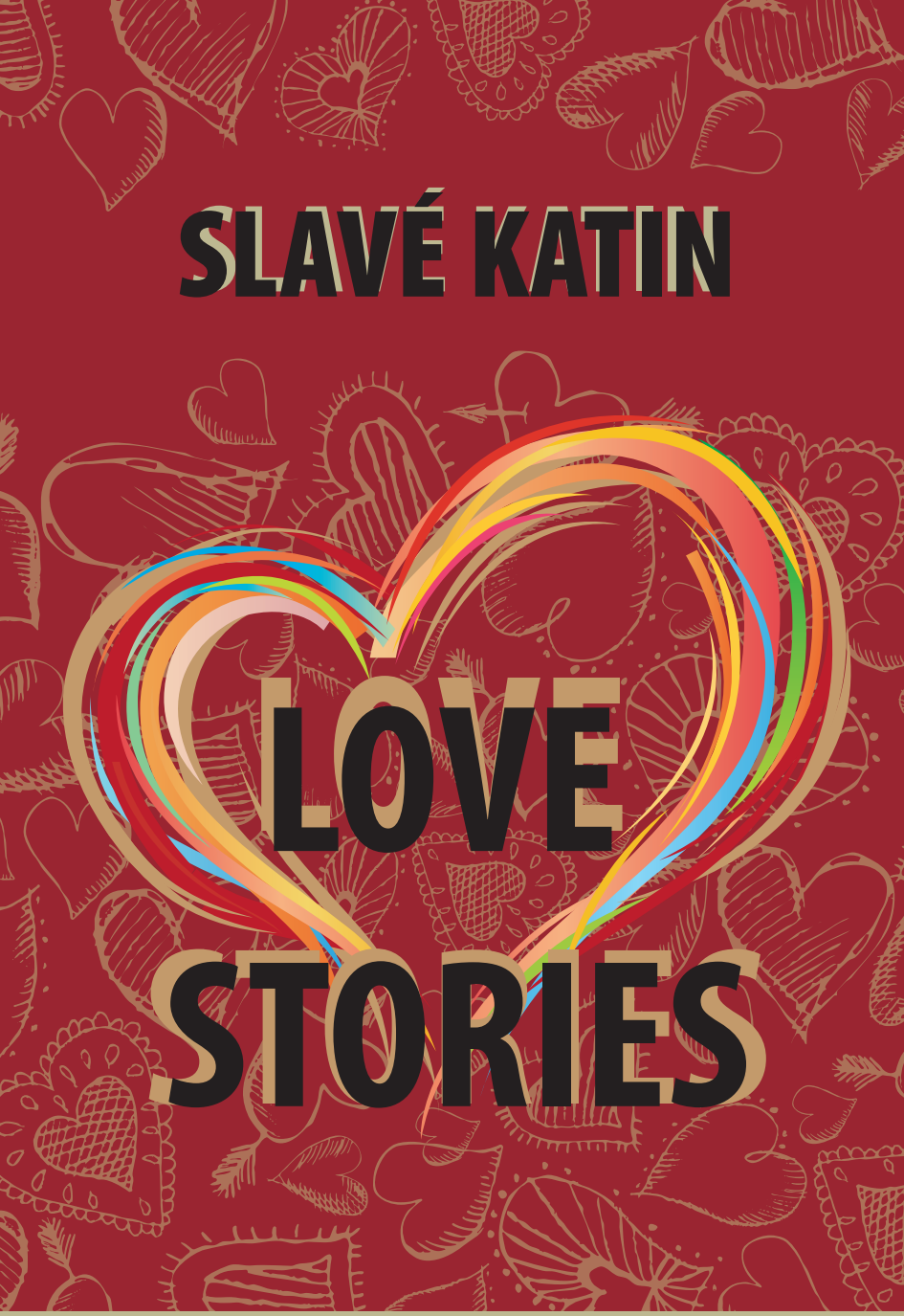
SLAVÉ KATIN



LOVE STORIES

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SLAVÉ KATIN
LOVE STORIES

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LOVE STORIES

(MACEDONIAN EMIGRANT LOVE STORIES)

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INTRODUCTION

Following my travels all over the world, I have published numerous texts and publications about the Macedonian emigrants who live in the United States, Canada, Australia and Europe. In addition to our talks about their golgotha, their typical problems and issues of an intimate nature were not avoided. Their genetic connection however with their families is very characteristic. This book titled “The Macedonian Emigrants’ Carousel” bears witness to this claim. It contains 20 confessions of our people at different ages, from different social statuses and no matter in which part of the world they live they nevertheless cherish their undying love for their homeland, their Macedonia.

The Macedonian man faces the fact that his major problem in the Diaspora is not only his day-to-day survival, but also his choice of a lifelong mate, to marry and start a family with, since marriage is holy for them and worthy of making great sacrifices.

The intimate stories contained in this book confirm this fact best. No matter where the struggle for the roots of the Macedonian family commences, whether in North America, Europe, Australia, or other countries, what is

importa6nt is that “blood is thicker than water”. And, consequently, the choice of the other half is neither easy nor uncomplicated. Regardless of the beauty, good-heartedness, ability and faith in married life of the Macedonians, the following stories show that the strict criterion for a Macedonian family could hardly be satisfied by women from other nationalities other than the Macedonian damsels, with a few exceptions of course. This book, however, dwells on these selected stories which offer the best explanation on this subject.

Many different and exciting events which are unusual, piquant, tragicomic… take place within the love life of the Macedonians, not only in their fatherland but also in the Diaspora. The traditional philosophy of marriage for any Macedonian is based mainly on the understanding that each woman should find an adequate lifetime companion with whom to share the good and bad, while each man should find a mate who will give birth to his children and with whom he can establish a family of good reputation. But, there are many others who do not comply with these rules. However, they are given the opportunity to tell their intimate stories to a trusted friend and under exceptional circumstances.

Nonetheless, the exceptions are not the rules and I leave them to the consideration of my readers.

Slave Katin

1. THE SOURED IDYLL

The following event took place in Detroit. One day I encountered an acquaintance of mine at the hotel where I was staying. Her name was Kate and I hadn't heard anything about the why she "had disappeared" from Macedonia. I knew that she had moved away but I didn't know where, in spite of my numerous contacts and inquiries of our emigrants on all continents. Our meeting was unexpected and exciting. It was a surprise for both of us. She came from a mixed family, from the southern part of Macedonia. Although she was married, she was as beautiful and charming as she used to be in her youth. She was a brunette, with long hair, prominent cheeks and attractive brown eyes.

Word by word, starting from her youth and ending with her moving abroad and marrying Atanas K., she told me all about her rise and fall, living and working abroad. After her arrival in the USA, she had some problems adapting to her husband. She had met him in Macedonia and after a very short time she married him. However, she managed to overcome her nostalgia for Macedonia and succeeded in building her career as a successful businesswoman. She also told me that she fell in love

with her husband, a Macedonian emigrant in Detroit. Such a love obsession could hardly ever be experienced she said. In regard to her storytelling, I asked Kate to be honest and open so that it would be interesting to my readers.

She agreed. At first she was uncomfortable but later she became more relaxed. She started with her life with Atanas by saying that it was a successful life in the beginning with many exciting experiences. They could afford such a lifestyle because he had a good income. He didn't hesitate to fulfill all the wishes of his beloved wife. Whatever she wanted, he gave her. However, their idyllic life only lasted for the first years of their marriage. She was expecting their first child. Their yearning to start a real family was coming true and the dreams she had as a girl were also coming true. They were endlessly happy.

But one day their hopes fell like a house of cards. The medical test results showed that she was not pregnant and that she could never have children. It also showed that Atanas was not at fault. This fact caused them both to feel sad and started to erode their idyllic life. Nevertheless, as time went by their mutual wound healed as if they had forgotten their sorrow. This didn't have a significant impact on their love. On the contrary, their sexual life increased in intensity. Besides that, her sexual appetite increased and she couldn't satisfy her desire for sexual games. Atanas enjoyed satisfying her desires in the beginning, but he became weaker partly due to his age but mainly because of the sexual temperament of his woman. He didn't try to find fault with Kate, but with himself. It was then that she started looking for satis-

faction from other men. Atanas pretended that he didn't see what was going on and resigned himself to the fact that he could only keep his wife by his side by doing so.

When she spoke about the sexual qualities of her beloved and respected husband, Kate also added that another Macedonian citizen (Ljupčo M.), who was staying in Detroit as a businessman, attracted her the most of all other Macedonians through his manhood, elegance, storytelling spirit and patriotic dedication, even during the first night of his stay. Their love affair burst into flame those few days he stayed in Detroit.

This euphoria of love continued with great intensity even after he had returned to Macedonia. Soon after that, Kate told Atanas that she felt a great nostalgia for Macedonia and needed to visit her parents and friends, and asked him to let her go. Being careful not to hurt her, he consented, expressing regret that he couldn't join her due to his business commitments. Then she started kissing and caressing him, promising that she would also visit his relatives and, if possible, she would try to find him business partners from Macedonia. She had never been so happy before. She felt as if she was going to Macedonia for the first time.

Before traveling to her homeland, Kate contacted Ljupčo M, her boyfriend in Skopje. She informed him of her intention to go to Macedonia in order to continue their sweet love affair there as well. She asked him to make reservations at the hotels where they would stay and to prepare himself for their new "Olympic meeting". Kate was always passionate in bed and thought that her way of making love was memorable. "Good sex charges the

batteries," Kate told her friend, in Skopje, over the phone. The preparations for her journey took a long time.

One day Kate landed at the Skopje airport where Ljupčo welcomed her. He had swept her off her feet during his stay in Detroit as nobody else had done. He arranged her accommodation in a luxurious hotel in Skopje. During her stay in Macedonia, Ljupčo planned to take her to Bitola, Ohrid and Dojran where they would stay in the best hotels in order to experience to the maximum what could not be experienced anywhere else. In other words, to produce such "a documentary" about their love affair that it would be worth winning the most prestigious Hollywood award.

Their meeting at the airport was also "hot". They went to a hotel room to take a rest and to mark the start of their love life in Macedonia. It was understood that Ljupčo wished her a warm welcome in his style and deliberate manner. Strangely enough she was surprised. Here, being on his turf, he was a better lover, by just a shade, than he had been in Detroit. While she was recollecting Ljupčo's love obsession, she said that a sexual life was a vital category in which there were no rules. According to Kate, sexual life was something that lovers created together regardless of the tradition and understanding about sex in the country.

Kate also told me about the case of her friend, whose husband simply weakened sexually after two years and therefore couldn't satisfy "his domestic obligations". Therefore she was forced to look for satisfaction from another man. Her lover was also from Macedonia, as was

Ljupčo. Their relationship started in the USA and became more intense in Macedonia.

The next day of her stay in Macedonia Kate and Ljupčo started out on their tour, taking pleasure in the wonderful moments of happiness they felt in their search for it all over the Balkans and in America. Aware that nothing happens by itself and that happiness and attraction should be looked for and enjoyed to the fullest when they are found, Kate and Ljupčo filled their lives with the elixir of youth and passion.

It is not purely by chance that love knows no limits, and that the love partners are simply infatuated. That was the case of Kate and Ljupčo. During their stay in a hotel in Dojran when they were feeling “on top of the world”, they went out of the room and to their surprise saw the brother of Atanas who was staying in the next room with his wife. Atanas’s brother lived in Macedonia but at that time he and his wife were staying at the same hotel. Kate and Ljupčo met them in the hallway. They were all extremely surprised. In a word, they were awestruck by that unexpected and chance encounter. And, as in a movie, they shook hands and disappeared as if they had never met. Their encounter was never revealed to Atanas, but the family scar remained forever.

2. A STRANGE TWIST OF FATE

I got on the plane in Frankfurt airport, flying to New York, and a man was seated next to me. It was the same man I had just met in the airport terminal. So he became my fellow traveler during this journey across the Atlantic. Fortunately this fellow traveler from Macedonia, who was going to visit his parents in the USA, was talkative and interesting, having a broad general knowledge for discussion. His name was Stefan N. He was a civil engineer and had traveled to Europe and America often. His parents came from Ohrid region and had been living in the USA for more than forty years. This time, as he told me, he was going there to see his mother who was very ill and who had, several times, expressed her wish to see him. Unfortunately, her illness prevented her from going to her homeland, Macedonia.

We left Frankfurt airport and the plane took us high in the sky. Soon we were served drinks by a beautiful, thin and graceful stewardess. Feeling relaxed, I commenced a conversation with my fellow traveler, Stefan. The journey to New York took eight hours. It is preferable for most people to have such a talkative neighbour because the loneliness during long journeys can be a psychological burden. In addition to being talkative, my fellow traveler

told me his story as well, which I have titled “A strange twist of fate”.

His place of origin was the Ohrid region. Almost all of his life he was left to himself, to live his life as he wished. His goal was to graduate and justify the freedom he was given and the faith his parents had in him. While he was a student, he usually had a part-time job during the summers as a bellman in one of the hotels on the coast of Lake Ohrid, or sometimes as a tourist guide for the archeological groups who carried out archeological explorations in the localities of that region. He often hired and captained a rowboat for short travels by the lake, especially for women, in order to show them the sights of Ohrid and Struga, as well as Lake Ohrid. He was an experienced guide. Therefore he was hired by many travel agencies from Ohrid, Skopje and Belgrade. As a result he earned a good income.

The tourist season in Ohrid was very busy that summer. Guests were arriving from all over and he was already working his part-time job in a hotel on the coast of Lake Ohrid. One day a wonderful young woman appeared at his desk and presented herself as a German woman from Munich. She asked him for a single bed room with a view of the lake. He saw the name in her passport was Linda. She was a slender, blonde woman with blue eyes. She spoke excellent English and told Stefan that she was in Macedonia for the first time. She chose Ohrid as her destination after a friend of hers had told her so many wonderful things about this pearl in the Balkans. According to Stefan, it was a bold move for a girl of her

age but she was probably motivated by the excitement which such a journey offered.

Their conversation at his desk continued. He was an interesting and charming conversationalist. He promised that he would be at her disposal during her stay in Ohrid. He tried his best to leave a good impression with her. She secretly felt in love, at first sight, with this corpulent Macedonian. Their love affair started the very first night with mutual passionate feelings accompanied by a surge of strong emotions.

Stefan spent all his free time with Linda. He took her to picnics in nice areas in the surrounding region and was with her late into the night. Anyone who saw them thought that they were great lovers or a newly married couple enjoying their honeymoon. Such impressions were not far from the truth – Stefan and Linda were really in love with each other. Soon their love blossomed and Stefan secretly moved into her apartment so that they could spend their nights together.

Linda's fifteen day holiday in Ohrid went by at lightening speed and too soon their day of parting came. Both of their bills were paid by this rich, German girl. She promised that they would see each other again at the first good opportunity. They exchanged addresses and phone numbers. They simply were unable to break off their affectionate and passionate hug to say good-bye. Stefan remained at the airport until the plane disappeared on the horizon above Lake Ohrid. He was waving his hand at her as if Linda was looking at him from the sky.

However, their parting in Ohrid didn't sever their contact. Every second day they had telephone

conversations at her expense. She knew how to fill the time – not only with an outburst of emotions but also with concrete proposals for their future meeting. It didn't take a long time.

In the beginning of January the next year, only six months after their parting, Linda announced her second trip to Macedonia. But this time she asked Stefan to arrange a tour to visit many other cities and tourist resorts, especially the famous winter ski resorts. Stefan welcomed her at the Skopje airport. Their accommodation was in a hotel in the centre of Skopje. Their rent-a-car picnics to Bitola and Pelister, Tetovo and Šara, Mavrovo and Bistra, Dojran and Berovo, to Radika and other places started and ended in Skopje. This time Linda stayed in Macedonia for one month and twice during her stay they went shopping to Solun. They usually stayed for several days in the winter ski resorts in order to visit several monasteries, such as St. Jovan Bigorski, the Monastery of Osogovo, the Monastery of Lesnovo and others. Linda used her video-camera to make a documentary which she presented to her colleagues at the company in Frankfurt, owned by her father.

The ideal summer-winter odyssey of Stefan and Linda lasted for three full years until one day she put forward a concrete proposal: to get married, buy a house either in Skopje or Ohrid and live together. Shocked by these proposals, Stefan asked for some time to think it over. He already had a girlfriend in Macedonia that he wanted to marry and start a family with. Linda didn't know this and had no idea that he already had a girlfriend. Their relationship was just a façade without a firm foundation.

After Linda's proposal they agreed that Stefan would make a decision and make plans before she returned.

It was the most difficult time of their relationship for him. What was more dramatic was the demand from his Macedonian girl to marry her. Therefore Stefan found himself in dire straits. His Ohrid romance with the German girl slowly but surely was becoming a trap that attracted him so much because of their absolute harmony in love and Linda's wealth. But the future frightened him a lot at the same time.

The Boeing was approaching the North-American continent and Stefan's story was almost finished but I was impatient to hear the end because we are almost helpless when we realize that we are not masters of our own destiny. Did Stefan find a way to get himself out of the situation? His answer was unpredictable and Linda's conduct was unforeseeable.

Only three months after their last meeting in Skopje, Linda again arrived in Skopje. She was very excited and ready to accept the all proposals that Stefan would offer her. Much to her surprise, however, they were not as she expected.

After dinner at the hotel, they spent all night in their room arguing and it would end their relationship. Stefan admitted to having a Macedonian girlfriend for several years, with whom he planned to marry and start a family and these plans were in their final stage. But he also admitted that Linda was a wonderful girl who could sweep any man off his feet. It was such a pity that she had fallen

in love with him, expecting that he would become her mate.

During that long and difficult night, the German girl gave up and agreed that there would be no marriage, but under one condition – that their relationship would continue both here in Macedonia and in Germany. She reassured him that she would continue to cover the expenses for such a sacrifice on his part as she had in the past. Stefan accepted her proposal under the condition that she was to marry a German man in Germany and that he was to marry the Macedonian girl in Macedonia. They would go to each other's weddings as guests, due to their great friendship. Strangely enough, Linda agreed to his proposal. They made an agreement that by the end of that year she would get married in Frankfurt and he would marry in Ohrid. In addition, she would come with her husband to his wedding and he would go to her wedding with his wife.

Their agreement was honoured with small concessions. The love affair of Stefan and Linda continued after she got married. Stefan confessed that he was feeling a prick of conscience and had an uncomfortable feeling that he had done something wrong. He often had long bouts of indecision about their future meetings, but it was hard for him to separate from Linda. Before his journey to the USA, he spent several days at their house in Frankfurt. Both Linda and her husband accompanied him to the airport and said goodbye.

3. THE CURTAIN OF LOVE

It often seems that women are addicts of love. Such a dependency, in fact, is manifested through the woman's striving to master the art of love by her self-assessment and self-respect. The release from such turbulent feelings of uncertainty relies on the foundations of many thoughts and imaginations that such women have about the stronger sex. This explanation and release is both fictional and imaginary and, at the same time, incomprehensible. It seems that there is no more marvelous feeling than that of the euphoria of amorousness and exaltation.

My old acquaintance Andrea S., born in the region of Lerin, was an engineer by profession. He had been living in Canada for more than ten years. Canada is very far away from Macedonia geographically, but nevertheless intimately very close. He was a spiritual person full of pearls of Macedonian life, obviously inherited from his parents in their homeland.

I didn't have a chance to meet this interesting fellow citizen of ours in the past in spite of my frequent visits to Toronto. His many years of work in the north, which the Canadian authorities were preparing to be settled on a large-scale, was the reason for that.

We were seated in an elegant restaurant in the city's downtown, owned by a Macedonian from the Aegean part of Macedonia, when Andrea started narrating his life story which was unusual to a great extent.

His first misfortune in Canada was his friendship with a young Macedonian saleswoman in a textile shop where he went to buy a knitted pullover. Her beauty, grace and entrancing glance, as well as her behaviour towards him, attracted him so much that he immediately forgot the shopping. Beautiful Emilia couldn't take her eyes off him and she soon accepted the plan he immediately proposed to her.

After several meetings in the store, they continued to see each other in various nightclubs and restaurants where his hard-earned money was quickly being squandered. Soon they reached their finale and he moved into her place.

Emilia was born in a village in the region of Bitola and later went to Toronto to live with her relatives. Two years before he met her she had started a job, rented an apartment and spent all her money in night clubs, hanging around with different men. What Andrea didn't know was the fact that she had already had intimate relationships with men of different nationalities, race and colour. Her sexual relationship with them lasted only for a month or two. She used to change men as if they were bathroom towels.

Less than three months after the wedding of Andrea and Emilia their marriage simply broke down; without a word, without any quarrel. The young bride just disappeared from his life forever. In addition to that sleepless

night, my friend had to resign himself to his fate. However, he was happy that their relationship hadn't been legalized in any of the municipalities of Toronto.

Disappointed by his failure to start a family, Andrea, after some time, made up his mind to marry a Canadian girl of French origin that he had met at the wedding of his friend from Quebec. He was tortured by the thought that other Macedonian women, after settling in Canada, maybe understood their freedom as a sexual revolution which they had to experience in order to fit into the new society. Therefore he decided to marry Natalie who accepted him without a word, first as her companion in restaurants, clubs and at disco parties where she used to go, and, later, when she got to know him better, also as his soul mate. Natalie was an attractive girl with an unusual captivating smile. She was fairly small in stature but she had lovely breasts and long legs. As a lover, he passed the test with an excellent grade, which motivated them to move their relationship to marriage.

Taught by his experience with Emilia, this time Andrea didn't rush into legalizing their relationship at a municipality, but simply had a ceremony with their closest and dearest friends. He decided to get to know his soul mate better before putting his signature on a state register. It was as if he had a premonition that his previous experience with the Macedonian woman was possible in this relationship too.

And it happened just like that. Only a month later he found out that Natalie, during her 20s to 30s, went through a period filled with a series of tumultuous adventures, and even two short-term marriages. As an

editor-in-chief at a publishing house she carried out her duties meticulously and responsibly, but nevertheless couldn't find real enjoyment in her job. She easily attracted the attention of men with her temperament and cleverness but unfortunately her relationships didn't last long. Her days were filled with dreams of a new love. She wondered if the next man would be the one to tame her feelings and desire. Deep in her soul, Natalie was getting more and more tired of her numerous relationships with various men. Therefore she decided to put an end to her "joyful" wanderings and settle down with Andrea. After only one month of abstention however she realized that the life she was leading was senseless and that, besides excitement from love, she was unable to feel the beauty of many activities that she hoped would give her enjoyment. Going to theatres didn't satisfy her if her last lover was not next to her. Her friends were boring if they didn't like to talk about men. Even the work at the publishing house was becoming dull and boring if her last lover was not there with her.

Terrified by the strong feelings she was hiding behind the curtain of love addiction, Natalie started to lose her desire and will to fight against it and one day she left Andrea, leaving no explanation for making such a decision.

After several days of waiting for her call, Andrea finally came to terms with his loneliness, as he had with Emilia before her.

He could understand everything, except the situation in which he had nothing but bad luck. But he managed to accept the situation and heal his wounds,

determined to use his third chance to be successful in finding a lifelong soul mate. A long period had passed and he had more than one girlfriend. But he was unable to solve the central dilemma: whether this time he was to choose a Macedonian girl or a non-national?

He found the answer to this dilemma during a one-day cruise on Lake Ontario. Many of the passengers enjoyed the summer sun and beautiful panoramic view of the ship's deck, dozing off in the comfortable beach chairs. Enchanted by the romantic scenery, Andrea napped while the light wind caressed his face. When he opened his eyes he saw a beautiful young girl just a few steps from him who was watching him curiously. Her smile "took" him to her. He made the acquaintance of this beauty. Her name was Angelina. She was born in Canada, but her parents were from Prespa, Macedonia. She was a tall, beautiful and presentable girl. Andrea's heart leaped when he exchanged his first words with her.

Angelina had a university education and was an environmentalist. She lived in an apartment in a beautiful building near the beach on Lake Ontario, close to down-town. She always arranged their meetings somewhere close to the lake.

Their rendezvous were becoming more and more frequent. Their love affair was becoming stronger and more interesting. One day Angelina, or Angel, as Andrea used to call her, suggested they marry. The expression on his face was of approval and great satisfaction. However his soul was still tortured by his past experiences. He was

afraid that destiny would turn its back on him and therefore he felt insecure.

After many sleepless nights thinking about the dilemma – a marriage or not – he nevertheless found the strength to marry Angelina. Although he did have unsettling anxiety, he later realized that Angelina was the woman of his dreams. Their love was so strong so that Andrea opened his heart telling Angela all about the adventures he had experienced since coming to Canada.

They spent the following months together and got to know each other better in every way; discovering their characters and characteristics necessary for a successful marriage. When she introduced him to her parents, they were delighted with Andrea. They liked him more because he was a mechanical engineer and they needed one for their metal construction company which used many subcontractors. Getting involved in the business of his wife's parents gave Andrea a perfect opportunity to get to know them better and vice versa, which was guaranteed to enrich their family.

The wedding ceremony of Andrea and Angel (as her parents also called her) was prepared very carefully. There were more than 500 wedding guests from all parts of Canada where Macedonians live and work. Contrary to his past marriages, this time he took Angela to City Hall where their marriage was legalized. The wedding ceremony and reception lasted for a whole day in a large hall in a hotel.

"The Macedonian marriage is nevertheless an undying fortress," said Andrea bringing an end to his love story.

4. THE NEW YEAR'S SÉANCE

While I was studying in Belgrade I had a great number of friends and colleagues and I still have close ties with some. So it happened that my fellow students, with whom I was studying, invited me to ring in the New Year at the "Moscow" Restaurant in Belgrade. As a student I was living in the dormitory, while they were living with their parents in Zvezdara, a Belgrade suburb, where many events related to Belgrade's social and cultural life took place. I attended many such events and it was my pleasure to be a part of that life.

I arrived in Belgrade in the middle of winter when weather conditions in this city couldn't be predicted. It was very cold outside and almost unbearable. There was half a meter of snow in the parks and on the pavement and the temperature was well below zero. Winter was showing all its severity and beauty. The bad winter weather was not a surprise to me because I was prepared for such conditions. What was a great surprise to me however was an old friend of mine from Skopje, from my secondary school days, who was also sitting at the table that evening. I didn't know that Vančo T. was also a close friend of the friends who had invited me. And it should be said that the friendship in that state (which was dissolved)

was of the highest ethnic quality. But that was another time with its characteristics, good opportunities and difficulties.

That New Year's meeting remained in my memory for the good time and also for meeting with my dear classmate. I hadn't seen him for ages so we agreed to meet again and talk about the good old days. That's exactly what we did. We soon met again in a restaurant, talking late into the night. We refreshed our memories not only from our childhood but also from our youth and we really enjoyed that chat.

Several years after this New Year's gathering I met Vančo again, but this time on the premises of the Matica na iselenicite od Macedonia (An Association of Macedonians in Other Countries) where I was working at the time. On that occasion he told me his story of when he traveled by train to Skopje two or three days following that New Year's Eve. His love adventure started out in the train compartment where two girls were sitting next to him. One of them didn't waste time and started to court him immediately. Love at first sight! Her name was Valentina. She fell in love with Vančo right away and she fell into his arms while they were in the tunnel, not far from Avala. The great love between Vančo and Valentina, which left deep scars on both of them, started that way.

Valentina was a tall, slim girl, with curly, long hair, brown eyes, a fresh complexion and decent make up. She wore expensive perfume and expensive clothes which made her more attractive. In comparison to her, Vančo was a large and athletically built person with broad

shoulders. Since he was practicing gymnastic exercises on the horizontal bar, he was almost like a bodybuilder with a perfectly proportioned body.

The love affair between Vančo and Valentina started in the train and continued late that evening in Skopje where Vančo invited the two girls to his apartment for coffee. His invitation was accepted eagerly. After an hour the friend left and Valentina stayed with Vančo. Their amorous passion lasted for the whole night and the next day they cut the ribbon of their love palace with satisfaction.

Vančo wasn't married but he had a girlfriend in Skopje. He planned to marry her and start a family. But he concealed this fact from Valentina since he didn't intend to marry her anyway. For her part, Valentina believed that Vančo was prepared for married life with her after that sleepless night.

This new affair caused Vančo many problems which he had to solve quickly. First, whether Valentina was ever to come to his apartment again because there was always the possibility that his girlfriend could drop by and see her there. This could lead to a break in his long-lasting relationship, which Vančo didn't like under any circumstance. On the other hand his new love affair with Valentina caught his attention because of her aggressive and open passionate love, which was not typical for Macedonian women. The new relationship had everything that his future wife didn't have. But his future wife had the qualities he wanted for marriage – a strong love of home and family, which was the dream of any Macedonian man.

Valentina, however, didn't fit that stereotype and therefore she brought a breath of fresh air into his sexual life.

The dilemmas Vančo had about this new relationship were also intensified by Valentina's wealth. She paid all the expenses for their stay in various hotels, motels and restaurants, most often out of Skopje, mainly in Kumanovo, Strumica and Bitola. Valentina's wealth was not the result of the care of her parents for their only daughter but from the huge profit reaped by her beauty parlor, which was well-known in Skopje. Famous artists, models, rock-stars and beautiful girls didn't question the prices charged to improve their looks.

Valentina's beauty parlor was working at full capacity but she didn't neglect Vančo and went with him all over Macedonia. After they became bored with the comfortable beds in the Macedonian hotels, they started to look for excitement out of the country. Their first picnic in Italy was at her initiative. The new destination was Venice and Milan where one event would impact her career. There she met an old friend. She was working at one of the famous hairdressing shops and they needed an experienced cosmetician. Valentina was there just at the right time. She couldn't turn down such a good opportunity. It didn't pose any risk for her business in Macedonia, which was functioning perfectly even without her presence. The contract was signed and she arranged for her documents to be prepared, which would take only one month, after which she would move to Milan.

From Milan the lovers went to France. After they finished their tour in Monte Carlo, they went to Vienna to close the circle of their journey which started with his trip from Belgrade to Skopje. Although a great deal of Valentina's financial resources were spent, she didn't pay attention to it. Her credit card was working well in comparison to Vančo's physical condition, which was evidently diminishing, resulting in complete failure at love making in Vienna. But Valentina had a complete understanding of her lover and that fact didn't worry her at all. Her first move was to increase his love-making potential by giving him a chance to rest and build up his strength in order to restore his "Olympic shape" in Skopje.

After they returned to Skopje, Valentina started to prepare for her move to Italy, while Vančo tried to make it up to his girlfriend. He explained to her that he was not in Skopje because he had to go to Belgrade in order to write some exams.

Valentina's move to Italy was like a cold hand on a fevered brow, but it was also a definite separation from her. Their meetings depended on him, not on her anymore. He could therefore completely dedicate himself to his future wife.

Valentina moved to Milan where she managed to establish herself well, but Vančo sent her shocking news a year later. He told her that he was going to marry the girl with whom he had already had a relationship for several years. However he would not give up Valentina if she got married too, even to an Italian. After they exchanged such coded messages there was a break in their contact, which lasted for several months. He

believed that the love affair with Valentina had ended when, one day at the end of September, she called him from Milan inviting him to go there. She stressed that she would send the airplane ticket to him immediately and would wait for him at the Milan airport.

Vančo told his girlfriend that he had to go to Belgrade for his exams. He would be there for several days. He persuaded her not to see him off at the bus station because the bus for Belgrade departed early in the morning when the city was still in a deep sleep. Around noon that day he flew to Rome and from there to Milan. And he was not making a mistake. The episode with Valentina in Milan drove him mad.

She was waiting for Vančo at the airport with her Italian lover and introduced Vančo as her first cousin. She told her lover that Vančo was taking care of her ill sister who was not yet employed. From the airport they went to a restaurant. Later Valentina and her lover said goodbye to Vančo, wishing him a pleasant trip home.

Vančo couldn't even imagine such an ending to his relationship with Valentina. The woman who was crazy about him and spent so much money on their love affair had suddenly turned her back on him, delivering a bitter and sharp blow. She kicked him out of her life like so much junk in Milan. It is true that man learns as long as he lives! Such lessons are unforgettable. Vančo finished his confession with these words and sadness in his voice. We parted in the evening of that day. I was holding my diary, in which I wrote the events of the love affair of Vančo and Valentina, while I watched him disappear towards the centre of the city.

5. A MEETING IN RIO

During my stay in Rio de Janeiro, where there was a scientific meeting on the topic “State and Religion”, I was given an opportunity to learn a strange truth related to an unusual event. I couldn’t even dream that one day, in a restaurant on the well-known beach of Copacabana, I would meet a Macedonian man. He had moved to Brazil after the end of WW II, in which he actively participated, immediately after the liberation of Macedonia and the establishment of its new government. After a staged spy affair in which he was accused of being a public enemy, he had to illegally leave his country with two friends and spend some time in a refugee camp in Lavrion, Greece, in order immigrate to Brazil.

The meeting in that restaurant was quite accidental. The man approached me when he heard me speaking Macedonian to my wife. Our fellow citizen was astonished to meet Macedonians in that distant foreign country. As if God had arranged that meeting, he told me that his heart pounded when he saw us coming into the restaurant. Suddenly he had a feeling that we were his fellow citizens, his countrymen and he was not wrong. That’s how I met Ivan, a man from Strumica Region who was very strong in spite of his seventy-years. He was a refined man, cultured and polite in habit and appearance. In addition, he was an elegant gentleman. But, as it is usually said, appearances can be deceiving and one’s appearance doesn’t always completely reflect their soul.

This was the case with Ivan who had a great sorrow in his heart for his native country, for his youth and for Macedonia despite all the years spent in Brazil. Our encounter was one of the few encounters he had with people from Macedonia. He was so excited that he couldn't hide his tears.

I gave Ivan one of my publications that refer to the Macedonians in the USA and Canada. Then Ivan learned that I wrote about Macedonians all over the world and that I came from Prespa. So he told me a story about his best friend who also came from Prespa, without knowing my relationship with this friend of his. The following story is about his friend with whom he spent many years, starting in Lavrion and going to Rio and with whom he shared his fate, both good and bad.

His friend Bogoja, a relative of mine, who was tall, respectable and handsome left Macedonia and his family after he married Spasa and after his son Sande was born. In those turbulent times it was not easy to prove the truth and he had to desert the army where he had a high rank. He had to save his soul before the worst happened – to be sentenced for life or executed. The act for which he was accused had the severest punishment, but Ivan claimed that Bogoja didn't commit any such act. After his escape, he lived for half a century far away from his motherland and his family without a word about his destiny, without seeing them again or returning to his native place. But, on the other hand, in his search for a better life he saw many countries and settled down in Brazil where he is buried.

During our conversation Ivan asked me many questions and I answered, doing my best to be as precise as possible and to satisfy his curiosity about life in Macedonia, the conditions there and the progress, and about Prespa. Many questions were related to Bogoja's native village, events of the past, but also current events, as well as with the fate of Bogoja's wife and son (a subject about which I was very cautious).

As he spoke it turned out that Ivan knew Bogoja's fate very well. In the spirit of goodwill and respect for his late friend, probably unaware of this fact, he did his best to tell me about his life, their escapades and everything they had experienced in Greece as camp inmates, about the pressure which the Greek police exerted on them and about other interesting events in the life of the three friends. I listened very carefully and wrote in my diary precisely what he said

After his escape, Bogoja's wife Spasa waited for him for ten years, hoping that he was safe and sound and that he would appear one day to be with his family. Sande grew up without knowing what his father looked like, except for his face in several faded photos dressed in his army uniform. After waiting ten years, Sande's mother remarried and moved to another place with her new husband. However Sande didn't go to live with them. After some time he went to Skopje where he graduated and got a job. He married a Macedonian woman, a teacher by profession, and they had two wonderful children – a son and daughter who were happily married not long before this meeting. His daughter and her husband now live and work in Paris in a specialist area of a state-owned

company. His son and his wife are researchers and have a daughter who is named after her grandmother.

Although the exciting conversation with Ivan went on into the dead of that night, we didn't finish. However, we decided to stop and have dinner since the aroma was stimulating our appetite. Ivan told us that we were his guests. He ordered the most expensive local specialty. The meal was very expensive. He was both happy and aware that this meeting of ours was priceless and that dinner was the least he could do to compensate for such a conversation, or should I say a confession. We washed down the delicious meat, mushrooms and various dressings with the best Brazilian wine, which led us to a lengthy discussion about Brazilian cuisine, but also about the Brazilian spiral, and the ups and downs in the lives of Ivan and Bogoja. We postponed the earlier conversation until the next day.

The afternoon our conversation began spontaneously. Ivan again turned to the fate of Blagoja and wanted to tell me everything about his friend at once, with great zeal. He told me that after they had left Lavrion in Greece, the three of them, Ivan, Bogoja and Mihajlo, boarded a ship whose destination was Latin America. Their journey lasted a long time, sailing across the Atlantic Ocean – from Spain to Honduras and Nicaragua and over to Peru, Chile and the Strait of Magellan to Brazil and Rio de Janeiro respectively. Two years had passed since their escape from Greece until the time when they entered the largest country of Latin America. They spent one year sailing by ship and another year they worked in many ports as migrant workers. Their journey took place in the period after WW II when the chaos of

lawlessness was still rampant and refugees could move easily around the world. It was not purely by chance that many fascist criminals found shelter in Latin America after the war, trying to escape justice.

Ivan informed me that Bogoja got a job in the port of Rio, where he unloaded goods from ships coming into the port from all parts of the world. After some time he was promoted and was in charge of the transportation of ships. This promotion gave him a raise in pay also. He started to go to restaurants and bars and to move in the circle of emigrants from Europe. He rented a room in the suburb of the city, not far from the port. He used it mainly for sleeping because he worked more than twelve hours a day. After he learned Portuguese he started to communicate with other people – first with his neighbours and then with people he met in restaurants. He spent several years living that way and managed to gain some financial stability but was haunted, psychologically, with thoughts of his family in Macedonia, his wife and son, his dearest and closest.

So his life went on unchanged, day after day, as he was under pressure to meet his needs of survival, in the largest country on that continent. It remained unchanged until one evening someone knocked on the door. When he answered the door, he saw a confused, beautiful young girl in front of him who immediately apologized for her unintentional mistake. She told him that she was looking for somebody else, but realized that she had knocked on the wrong door. Bogoja smiled in order to put her at ease and told her that he was waiting for somebody too; but it seemed that God had sent her to him and therefore it was time for her to come in for a cup of coffee.

After some hesitation she agreed and went in to drink coffee with him. Their conversation lasted late that night – until they had exchanged their life stories which were not so different from each other. She was also a migrant worker from one of the western European countries and she was working hard to make her way in that unknown world; looking for complete happiness.

This unintentional meeting was crucial for both of them. They fell in love with each other. So Bogoja became her treasure and after some time she became his wife. Her name was Magdalena. They had two daughters who gave birth to several grandchildren. While he was alive, his grandchildren used to make his life happier. While he played with them, he often thought about his dearest and closest in Prespa, hoping that maybe one day he would see his family in his homeland.

Ivan stated that our meeting in his restaurant on the beach of Copacabana would remain in his memory forever and would be unforgettable. He was really glad that we had met, especially since I was from the place where his best friend was born. From that day onwards, I was his guest. The scientific meeting was over but I continued my stay in Rio meeting Ivan for friendly conversation until our departure.

As my host, Ivan showed me the most attractive parts of Rio. What I saw and experienced was unforgettable. It left deep traces in my heart and I wanted to remember that trip often. In the end we agreed that I would pay him back as his host in Macedonia – at a different time and under completely different conditions compared to those in Brazil.

6. RHAPSODY IN BLUE

As a journalist, I was given an opportunity to go to Israel and familiarize myself with the ancient culture of that country, whose history closely resembles the history of Macedonians and their struggle for existence through the centuries. Many thousands of Israelis lived in Macedonia for a long time and they were a driving force for its economic development. Regrettably, Hitler killed the largest part of the Macedonian Jews so there is only a small number of Jews in Macedonia at present – prominent and respected people in all walks of life.

I have written about the cultural history of this friendly country in my book titled “My journeys all over the world” and therefore I won’t dwell on it at length, but only on those relations between the Israelis and Macedonians that reflect the national connections between us, shaped and developed as much in Macedonia as in Israel. And the story which follows is just a continuation of these connections. This story begins in Bitola, the town where there used to be many Jewish families that came here as a result of their migration from Spain. As confirmation of this fact, I am going to mention the word “pandišpan” (sponge cake, delicious white unleavened cake, bread)

which is used in Bitola and which comes from the words “pane”, “di” and “span” (pane=bread, di=from, span=Spain, meaning bread from Spain).

One of these families is the family of Aaron M., who married a beautiful Jewish girl, Marian, in Israel. Her parents were from Sarajevo. Several years after World War II, Aaron’s family moved to Israel but they cultivated friendly relations with several Macedonian families from Bitola. However, connections with Macedonia faded slowly but surely after a long period of time due to developments caused by political changes all over the world, but especially in the Balkans. My tour of Israel, during which I experienced the biggest surprise, began in this city. I have become richer in a spiritual sense, which I had searched and wished for all my life. The great number of Christian and Jewish monuments made a strong impression on me, enriching my Christian faith, hope and love. I have experienced and strengthened all those words, expressions, acts and historical truths that I and Professor Petko Zlateski had presented in our “Biblical Dictionary”, the first of its kind in the Republic of Macedonia.

I touched down in the holy land of Israel at the great civilian and military airport “Ben-Gurion”, in Tel Aviv. It is the largest city in this country with a population of more than one million – the Jews came here from all corners of the world, even from Macedonia. My tour in fact commenced from this city.

The event that I have decided to single out and include in this book is the love story which I titled “Rhapsody in Blue”. During my visit to Jerusalem I met

Aaron – the Bitola man, as he liked to call himself, and his wife Marian in a large shopping centre. This meeting was arranged by a former friend of Aaron's with whom I had exchanged several messages from time to time. Since we didn't know each other personally, our mutual recognition was interesting and impressive: I was staring at them, they were staring at me and they sent me a signal with a discrete smile. We recognized each other. After a couple of seconds we held each other in a tender embrace. The meeting was exciting and we exchanged much information in a couple of seconds. We were talking about Bitola, about Macedonia, the old synagogue in Skopje, their friends living in Štip, and all that interested me about Israel. From that moment onwards, my stay in Israel was organized by my hosts Aaron and Marian.

This meeting with friends from Bitola made this prolonged visit to Israel full of many exciting moments, but it was also an opportunity for me to visit a great number of significant cultural and historic monuments, which is a rare and great experience for any unexpected guest. Aaron and Marian's house was near the centre of the city, which enabled me to use my free time to see the city alone, since my hosts were at work. Aaron owns of an import-export company, while Marian heads a ward at the city hospital.

Since Aaron and Marian were busy during the day, I spent a large part of my spare time with their son David. We spoke English because he didn't know Macedonian. I noticed, even from the beginning, that he treated me like a close relative. He looked more like a Macedonian, than a Jew – in appearance, whereas his character and

manners were typical for any nation. David was a Macedonian, genetically and a Macedonian national but no one else could detect him as such. He became a close friend of mine and saw me as his dear old friend.

Our friendship enabled him to create a complete picture of Macedonia and especially Bitola – the town of his friends which he had not visited since they had left. The native place of his parents had always attracted him like a magnet and my visit aroused not only his desire to go there, but also a challenge to visit Macedonia and expand his business. I told him everything about Macedonian agriculture, such as the ideal climate conditions created by God, the food processing industry, sunny periods, humidity, favourable conditions, but also about the relatively poor achievements in comparison with his country. David was excited about these facts and he underlined several times that he had an idea to use this opportunity to expand his business in the former fatherland of his parents.

On the weekend, Aaron and Marian took me to visit the regions that were not included in my itinerary, so that in addition to Jerusalem I have also visited Erihon and Masada – a desert plateau written in capital letters in the history of Israel. At this place, the tank divisions of the Israeli army used to take an oath that they would defend their fatherland and, if necessary, die for it, just like their ancestors did in the Roman period. Jewish children reaching the age of 13 are proclaimed, at this very place, as members of the Jewish community by an oath – an act related to their homeland which deserves special honour.

From an historical aspect, Macedonia has a similar destiny to Israel, but the behaviour of Macedonians towards their fatherland is different from that of the Israelis. They should be an example of how a fatherland should be protected and developed. On several occasions I heard that blood was shed for Israel, their fatherland, and that freedom was achieved by blood and defended by the mind.

In addition, their nine-year old son David, born after his parents immigrated to Macedonia, was amazing to me. At least I thought so until I learned that David was adopted in Macedonia after the doctors told Marian that she and Aaron could never have their own children. I was asked to keep that secret because David didn't know that they were not his biological parents and that it was not the right time to tell him the truth. David had a faculty education and was an engineer-agronomist by profession, heading their farm in the vicinity of Jericho – a well-known historical town in the Jordan Valley next to the rich water springs that have created conditions favourable for agricultural products, fruits and flowers.

Our people say that blood is thicker than water and this saying is a typical paradigm for the young Jews of Bitola. After I returned to Macedonia, I often communicated with David and his friends. I extended an open invitation to them to come to Macedonia and be my guests. And they really came. After exchanging many letters, David also decided to come and visit Macedonia – the country of his parents.

One spring Macedonia was lush with vegetation. It was more than lovely and a good time to have a guest;

the right time for his first visit in Macedonia. One May afternoon David arrived at Skopje airport to see the town where his parents had lived. At the same time, he wanted to expand his horizons and develop his knowledge of healthy food production.

I helped him make contact with appropriate companies. He was their guest for several days. After successful ventures, we went to Bitola. He told me in confidence that he felt the same way in Bitola as he felt in front of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. I was aware that I was not supposed to say anything about his Macedonian origin and that after a twenty-year absence he had returned to his native land.

Regardless of that fact, however, David felt at home in Bitola, among his closest. I introduced him to his peers, boys and girls of his age. He spent his best days in Bitola with them.

In his native town, David fell in love with a girl named Fana who was to become his wife a year later. The truth about his origin was revealed when he came to Macedonia for the second time, this time with his friends to arrange the wedding ceremony. They were more than happy that this son had found his mate in their ancient homeland – in Macedonia.

7. THE EGYPTIAN RELATIONSHIP

During my longer stay in the Republic of Turkey, which was filled with many meetings and parties, not only with the official representatives of this country, but also with many fellow citizens, the road took me to Egypt – the country of the pharaohs, one of the former vilayets of the Macedonian migrant workers, especially those from Gornorečieto who had arrived in these African regions at the beginning of the previous century. Although some of them had returned to Macedonia they still went there to collect rent from the apartments they owned, while others would go there to spend the winter by the Red Sea.

The reason for my travel to this biblical African country was to meet and become friends with the small number of Macedonians there and, at the same time, to fulfill a dream of mine related to Alexander of Macedon and his perception of himself as a god of Egypt. But instead of writing about this dream, I am going to write about an Egyptian relationship concerning a great love between a Macedonian man and an Egyptian girl living in Alexandria, the city of Alexander III (the Great) of Macedon and a powerful Macedonian Empire. Their destiny is not much different from the destiny of mixed marriages all over the

world, but yet it has distinguishing features typical for people in the Mediterranean.

The meeting with my friend Kiril was previously planned. We met in front of the Egyptian museum in the Tartar Square in Cairo. Our last meeting was in Skopje, around twelve years before, when he went on a business trip to Egypt related to economic cooperation with a company which exported leather. Since then I had lost track of him but I was told that he had fallen in love with a beautiful Egyptian girl, married her and was living in Egypt, in Alexandria, the birth city of his wife Fatima.

So after we met in the square, Kiril suggested that we go to the restaurant where he usually went when he stayed in Cairo. It was noon and time for lunch. Sitting in a pleasant private room, we started our conversation discussing many current topics but we dedicated most of the time to Egypt and the journey which had brought Kiril to Alexandria. He had never thought that this city would ever be his permanent dwelling. He had a fiancée in Skopje whom he planned to marry by the end of that year.

He already had a one-year contract with this company in Alexandria, but it was his first visit to Egypt. This fact was of crucial importance to his later destiny. There he met, as he said, the most beautiful girl in the world, the gorgeous Fatima, who worked as a secretary for the owner of the company. It was love at first sight. Instead of staying for several days, Kiril forever remained in Alexandria.

Fatima's family belonged to the Christian orthodox religion – to the Coptic Church, so that her love of Kiril was not an obstacle for them. His business partner had

nothing against his relationship with his secretary, but nevertheless he stressed that she was his right hand in the company, while her private life was her choice.

As the relationship between Kiril and Fatima became stronger and stronger, many unforeseeable moments emerged on the surface. Kiril felt it when he tried to tell his partner that he would like to marry Fatima and take her to Macedonia. From Macedonia, they would continue their business cooperation as usual. Hasan's reply was negative. He didn't want to give up his secretary so, he proposed that Kiril marry her and stay in Alexandria to live as a citizen of Egypt. This proposal changed the course of his life. Kiril broke off his engagement with his girlfriend in Skopje and although his parents insisted that he come back home to Macedonia, he remained in Egypt. Kiril and Fatima's love bond was very strong so one day Kiril told his partner Hasan that he was going to marry Fatima and asked him to be a witness at their wedding ceremony.

As a protest against Kiril's decision, his parents in Skopje refused to attend the wedding because they were against it. Kiril saw their reaction as a defeat he didn't expect, but he had to accept it and nurture his love for Fatima. For her part, Fatima also was sad about this news but she sympathized with Kiril and showed him kindness and compassion.

Before the wedding, Hasan bought them a house as a present. This gesture of Hasan strengthened their relations even more. The wedding ceremony was held at a luxury hotel with more than 300 guests, hosted by

Fatima's parents. The party lasted all night long. Its lasting impression is still remembered by many of them.

The second stage of this event began with their honeymoon which started in Sharm El Sheik and ended in Macedonia. Fatima's relatives kept this a secret until they returned to Alexandria fifteen days later. Fatima greatly appreciated this gesture of Kiril.

Fatima was amazed by Macedonia, this beautiful country in the Balkans, or as she used to say, by the Garden of Eden. She was especially impressed by their journey and stay in Ohrid, Prespa, Mavrovo, Radika, Pelister, Galičica, and other natural beauties about which she repeatedly said were the pearls of nature that could hardly ever be seen. This honeymoon made Kiril's dream come true, as well as Fatima's.

After their return to Alexandria, Fatima gave birth to a handsome son "shaped" in Macedonia and modeled in Egypt – the country of the ancient Macedonian migrant workers. The only disadvantage was that there was no one to teach him Macedonian because Fatima's parents took care of him.

In the beginning it was hard for Kiril to reconcile the boycott of his parents. With time, however, this problem also had a happy ending. Kiril's parent's anger slowly declined so one day they sent an invitation saying that their grandson was welcome to visit in Macedonia. Their invitation was accepted, to everyone's satisfaction, and one day later the young Gany flew from Cairo to Skopje with his grandma and granddad.

Their meeting was emotional and unforgettable. Kiril's parents accepted their grandson Gany and did their best to make his stay in Macedonia as pleasant and unforgettable as possible. In that way they healed the wound of their son Kiril.

After he returned to Alexandria, Gany showed the videotape to his friends in order to show his stay in Macedonia and its capital. This videotape became the most watched documentary about one country in no time. Such publicity and advertising about his father's homeland had never been provided before. Therefore, I suggested that Kiril should include tourism, especially in Macedonia, in the scope of activity of his company.

After Kiril finished his duties in Cairo, he suggested that we should go to Alexandria –to his company and his Egyptian home to introduce me to his family. He also suggested that we could plan for my tour through Egypt and for my accompaniment. That's how I met Hasan, Fatima and Gany and spent some more time in their warm family atmosphere. Then I set out to follow in the footsteps of Alexander of Macedonia for whom Egypt was a great challenge and who built the city Alexandria around 332 B.C.

8. THE INDIAN LOVE

In September 1997, I attended the funeral of Mother Teresa in Calcutta in the capacity of a member of the state delegation. We arrived in India to pay homage to our fellow citizen Agnesa Gondja Bojadziu who, as a result of her humanitarian activity in this large Asian country, won the Nobel Peace Price, the UNESCO Award for her contribution in the area of education, the Award "Dzavarlala Nehru", the Universal Mother Award, and many other awards and recognitions. In 1948, Pope Pius XII gave her permission to live as an independent nun, while in 2003 Pope John Paul II proclaimed her a saint.

On this occasion, however, I would like to write about another story which took place in Calcutta as proof of the fact that Macedonians have settled all over the world, not only in the known migrant workers' continents. I had never dreamt that it would be possible to meet, in the funeral procession of Mother Teresa, a Macedonian national, married to an Indian girl, present at her burial, or of his feelings of belonging to the same people. The man whom I met by pure chance was Cvetan. I met his wife too and, after the funeral rites, was invited to be their

guest in the house of our fellow citizen and our daughter-in-law, i.e. his wife from India.

The roads of destiny are incredible. Many years before, Cvetan had traveled by plane to Australia to visit his relatives in Sydney. At the airport in New Delhi, where the plane landed to be fueled, he took a walk around the shopping centre when he noticed a beautiful Indian girl. She asked him about something displayed in the glass showcase in front of them. He replied in English and then they introduced themselves and started a conversation. He invited her for a cup of coffee at a nearby restaurant and they got to know each other better. That conversation over coffee started in New Delhi and was to be finished also in New Delhi, not in Sydney. Soraya found her soul mate accidentally and unexpectedly when he went to India and stayed there after he returned from Australia, after numerous letters and phone calls. So there he was in India, the largest country on that continent that he had only seen on maps.

As a daughter of a high state official, Soraya brought her boyfriend home and introduced him to her parents. Although they were surprised, they approved the choice of their daughter and accepted him as her friend from university first and as her soul mate later.

It is understood that their love didn't develop at lightning speed. In the beginning, Cvetan was a student and lived in a dormitory. Later he moved into the private apartment of Soraya's choice and she paid the expenses. Their love affair lasted for two years. Cvetan informed his parents in Skopje and his relatives in Sydney about these latest

developments in his life so that their initial doubt and anxiety were relieved and they calmed down and accepted his decision. Cvetan's trump card for such an upturn in his life was his good looks which caused the girls in his homeland to fall all over him. The beautiful girl from India must have fallen head over heels in love with him because of his good looks and he must have won her with his charm. Because she belonged to the middle class, she could afford to take financial care of her fiancé whose name she couldn't pronounce at all. In the beginning she called him Sitan and then shortened it to Tan.

The wedding ceremony of Cvetan and Soraya was a gala event for that time. Even he, like other Europeans, couldn't believe that the people of India were experts in organizing such luxurious solemn ceremonies. In addition to the great spectacle, the most exciting fact, at least for the Macedonians, was the attachment of an Indian wife to her husband and his family respectively. All his relatives and friends were very happy and content with this, but most of all his parents who attended his wedding in New Delhi. Their videotape is still popular among the bridegroom's friends and acquaintances in Skopje. Such a luxurious spectacle has never been seen at any parties, not to mention any wedding ceremonies.

While Cvetan's parents were in New Delhi, they decided they should have a Macedonian version of their wedding, held in Skopje. But due to Soraya's obligations related to graduation from university, that ceremony was postponed for an indefinite period. However, it was held two years later when she became a project manager. This

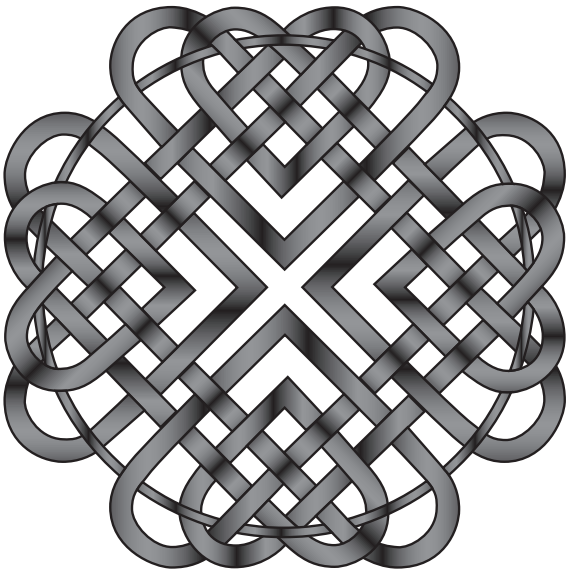
decision was prompted by Cvetan and his parents who hoped that Soraya, after coming to Skopje, would stay in Macedonia as an Indian bride to start a business with her husband, which would connect Europe and India. Such plans were the main preoccupation of the two families.

When I met them during the funeral of Mother Teresa in Calcutta their plans were in the final stage. I learned more information about them at the hotel where we were staying, before my flight to Skopje. But being more than happy by our meeting during the funeral of our fellow citizen, for which we expressed our condolences and respect, Cvetan and Soroya surprised me by asking me to be their guest. After a brief hesitation I accepted their proposal and visited them the following day to talk about India and Macedonia at length.

After all I had experienced, unintentionally, I couldn't shake the feeling that the world was so small and that a meeting between two Macedonians among a whole host of people was a real event! The thrill it created couldn't be experienced with such intensity in my fatherland. We are a different people at home. The reasons are obvious: century-long slavery, assimilation, exploitation and alienation, the influences of which we still experience from our neighbours in the Balkans. But when Macedonians are away from their birthplace and find themselves abroad, then they become different, worldly persons, with other spiritual and planetary horizons. Cvetan is a typical example. In their communication with him in English, Soraya's parents got the impression that their daughter had met a member of an old English school; a man of breadth, vision and magnetic charm.

Soraya's parents welcomed me and took me to their luxurious villa in a part of the city reserved for the high class, like Vodno Hill near Skopje. Their only daughter was their favourite so they were careful in their behaviour towards us, i.e. to their son-in-law and now also to the unexpected guest. The servants served lunch while we all told the story of our stay in Calcutta. They were pleasantly surprised by the fact that I, as a representative of the Macedonian state, attended the funeral of our fellow citizen, Mother Teresa, the most popular woman in India. This was why Cvetan and his wife had attended this mournful event; to pay homage and show their respect for Mother Teresa.

My stay in this Asian country, which was a British colony for many long years, was featured by seeing the sights of its cultural and historic monuments, in the company of my hosts Soraya and Cvetan. Is there anyone who could contradict that Macedonians and Indians have similarities in their genes that connect and bring them together?



9. DANGEROUS ADVENTURE

Australia, that distant country, is always a challenge for any unexpected guest. During one of my official visits to Australia, the meetings with my personal friends in Melbourne, Sydney and other cities were inevitable, in addition to official contacts with the representatives of the authorities of the Macedonian emigrant organizations and church communities of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. On that occasion my conversation with Alex S. from Sydney, an old friend from secondary school, created a lasting impression. We had made several arrangements to meet but it finally came true during this visit of mine when we decided to spend a whole day together and discussed our pleasant and unpleasant memories from our youth and his life abroad.

Alex was married to a Macedonian from the region of Prilep, a real beauty who moved to Sydney with her parents when she was fifteen. They had a daughter, his favourite, who was in the first grade. Each summer his daughter and her mother used to go to Melbourne to visit her granddad and grandma. Alex was a successful businessman and held a key position in a corporation owned by an Englishman building contractor – a

profession highly valued and respected in Australia because development of the construction industry there is dictated by a permanent inflow of migrant workers.

Alex didn't know about my visit to Sydney. He was surprised when I called him from the hotel where I was staying. He was more than happy to spend the weekend together talking about our experiences.

I had fifteen days at my disposal to carry out my official and private contacts in Australia and it was a very busy agenda. After I phoned Alex and arranged our meeting, I put my notes in order and decided to take a rest, staying at the hotel until the meeting with my old friend the next day. During the next ten days of my stay in Australia, I had to visit only Canberra and Melbourne on official matters, but private meetings like this were an integral part.

I met Alex the next day at the hotel restaurant where he told me a story that made a strong impression on him that he would never forget. It was an episode with an English woman name Mary which took place in the beginning of July, when his wife went to visit friends in Melbourne for an extended weekend.

After a marathon session at the Directorial Board of the company in which he worked, Alex went to a nearby bar to have a drink before going home for a deserved holiday. As he sat at the bar he ordered a glass of whiskey with ice. Suddenly, a beautiful young woman with golden curls stood next to him. Like any other civilized man, he introduced himself to her wishing her a good day and good health. She immediately showed interest in him.

Until then Alex hadn't had any contacts or amorous affairs outside his marriage because his family was everything to him and he was completely devoted to it. His wife and daughter were his greatest treasures that he wouldn't trade for a pile of diamonds let alone another woman. But he found himself in a situation of temptation and didn't know how to act: to accept the challenge or break off the game. He yielded to temptation and took the risk. He couldn't even imagine what was going to happen in the next two days. But let us continue the story.

From the bar, Mary took him to her apartment close by. She threw herself into his arms even in the hall. She showered him with passionate kisses as if they had been lovers for years. Alex took on the challenge. Quickly he experienced sexual climax in the hall standing on his feet, but they continued in her bedroom. The English woman was puzzled by the wild sexual drive of the Macedonian male. She didn't allow him to catch his breath. What they experienced together was stronger than a volcanic eruption. It was an unexpected erotic explosion which made them lose their bearings! When she learned that he was married and that he had a daughter, Mary reassured him that their meeting wouldn't have any impact on his marital harmony.

But evil never sleeps. They decided to spend the second day and night at his house which proved to be Alex's cardinal mistake. Being captive in the claws of passion, Mary behaved as if she was in seventh heaven, in a virtual world which belonged only to her. Alex came to his senses first from the sexual magic and suggested to

Mary that they split up and go on with their lives with these sweet memories. Mary muttered something under her breath which Alex perceived as her consent. But from that moment onwards his life was to turn into hell slowly but surely.

Two days later, his wife Biljana and his daughter returned to Sydney where they were welcomed by Alex with great warmth, which could only be shown by a man in love. He had missed his loved ones while they were away.

The apparent peace in their relations didn't last for long. Although Alex acted as if his life had returned to normal, he was emotionally affected by the chance that his life could be destroyed. The English woman couldn't get over the passionate affair with him. After a few days, the separation from him started to distress her so she phoned him often. First she phoned him at his job and then at his home. Mary persisted with her demands that their séances had to continue. Alex ignored her more and more, making efforts to keep his extramarital affair secret from Biljana.

Unfortunately all his efforts were in vain. Mary's aggressiveness became unbearable. In addition to her phone calls, Mary started visiting Alex at the company where he was working, creating an additional source of worry for him. He started thinking about moving to another apartment before this crazy woman forcibly entered his home and caused a family breakdown. He advertised that his apartment was for rent but unfortunately the English woman saw it. One day she came to his home and presented herself to Biljana as a client who was looking

for an apartment. She inquired about the rental conditions. When Alex returned home from work, he found her there and accepted her as a client, not as his lover. Therefore Biljana was spared the eventual stress, which she could have suffered, had she discovered who this woman was in reality.

From that moment onwards, Alex made extreme efforts to avoid any meetings with Mary. Unfortunately she didn't leave him alone at home either – she phoned him again and again. When Biljana answered the phone, the line was usually dead. Alex knew that it was the English woman and that she would not quit terrorizing his family. So he decided to tell Biljana what had happened while she was with her parents in Melbourne.

What he told came as a shock to his wife. She fell into a daze and demanded that he leave their home. Alex obeyed without saying a word, but he was in a panic from the misfortune which struck him. His absence was unbearable to his lovely daughter who phoned him every day asking him to come back home.

Meanwhile Alex's car, which was parked in a multi-level garage near the company where he worked, was set on fire. Two days later his daughter broke her arm at school causing his wife to experience not only a nervous breakdown, but also a car accident where she almost died. Alex asked for assistance from the police but unfortunately they didn't show great interest in his case. They asked for additional evidence proving Mary's involvement in all these accidents, but Alex couldn't provide it. Later, however, the police did their job.

After some time Alex returned to his wife who had already left the hospital and to his daughter who had recovered completely. He was very sorry about those accidents and misfortunes which he blamed on himself.

He decided to stay with his family and protect them, hoping that they would escape from that nightmare soon.

And it really happened that way. That moment was a turning point for his family. Their marriage resumed its normal course; the happy days of the past also returned.

10. LOVE LESSON

The love escapades of the Macedonians in the Diaspora are interesting and special stories, which are heard with particular interest and great attention. Habits, customs but mainly cultural traditions of people from all aspects of life, including love, are mixed and broken off in these stories. In a love affair, foreigners strike back at our emotion and explosiveness with their emotional control and rationality that exclude the euphoria which is our defining feature. As a result, our people who live and work in foreign countries, show resistance to having a foreigner in their homes because it causes them a lot of worry. As a result some of them return to their motherland forever, some of them try to find a spouse among their fellow nationals and in case all this doesn't work out, then they accept their fate of being single.

However this situation is changing slowly but surely. The world is opening up and is gradually becoming a global village. Therefore communication among people from different areas is becoming a basic need, especially in the new millennium when Europe is uniting and the borders among the states and nations are being pulled down. The more the world is enthusiastic about the

honesty and sincerity of our people and their culture, the more it is confused and surprised by their relaxed attitude, their inability to take initiative and frequent weakness in performing their work duties. However, this perception about the Macedonian people has started to change so that we are becoming, slowly but surely, an attractive nation for other people whose support in this context is becoming evident more and more.

A classic example of such processes that we go through is the positive assessment of the capability of our people when they are in the turmoil of their duties, their economic growth and when they become very prosperous businessmen for a short period of time. It is strange that these people couldn't fully express themselves in their fatherland. No one detects and no one evaluates their abilities adequately here so that after a certain time they start looking for a better life abroad. We are successful nationals abroad, while we are treated with reservation abroad. A phenomenon which embarrasses foreigners but brings Macedonians to their senses that we begin understanding that we need Europe more than Europe needs us. This irrefutable fact is confirmed also by our fellow countryman, a young civil construction engineer, who comes from a family that owns many hectares of land in Macedonia but who was looking for a job with well-known construction companies for more than five years. These companies became famous in our country after the 1963 earthquake, but also in foreign countries that, fortunately, have chosen their tenders coming from proven and cheaper companies in the world market in civil construction.

This fellow-citizen of ours is named Nikola P. married to a Dutch woman while staying there in the capacity of a civil construction engineer. Her interest in him was not in his profession but because he was masculine and handsome. Nikola was a well-built man, with grayish hair and blue eyes. But let us start from the beginning. When he arrived in Amsterdam it didn't take him long to find a job. He was lucky to get a job at the company of his future wife Matilda's parents, who were involved in civil construction work, mainly in the Netherlands. But this was the reason for getting the job. The daughter of the company owner wanted him from his first day of work and his career advanced there very quickly. Her family accepted him immediately as their future son-in-law and without any delay they sealed their relationship with marriage. At lightning speed, Nikola had solved two key issues – having a job and a wife – something which usually took much longer in his homeland, and required good luck and God's will. Good looks and profession are relative categories in Macedonia that, in comparison with Europe, are highly regarded abroad.

It was a marvelous wedding ceremony also attended by Nikola's parents, who invited the newlyweds and her parents to visit Macedonia and familiarize themselves with their son-in-law's fatherland. At the wedding Nikola and Matilda decided to spend their honeymoon in Macedonia, to be joined later by her parents. But what came as a surprise to the Dutch bride in Macedonia was the fact that Nikola was a rich man and owned several hectares of farmland in the triangle

between two rivers. It had not been worked for years and was overgrown with reeds after his parents moved to Skopje. His parents were teachers who supported him financially while he studied and graduated from the Civil Engineering Faculty in Skopje. His chances of him finding a job in Macedonia were poor because the demand for new workers declined after the Republic of Macedonia became independent. As a result, there were several hundreds of thousands of unemployed persons many of whom had university education, a master of arts degree or a doctorate.

This situation made it very difficult for Nikola to find a job. Getting a job was more by luck of the draw, but the surprises were yet to come. He was happily married and had solved all his financial problems.

After their honeymoon ended, they returned to Amsterdam to complete the preparations and provide the financial structure for an independent project they planned to undertake. They decided to carry out civil construction jobs in the Netherlands and at the same time to grow healthy, organic food on their land near Skopje.

After some time their business in the Netherlands began to flourish. Their company had a good reputation in their field. From project to project their company racked up one success after another. In addition, the production of organic food in Macedonia passed certification. One Macedonian-Dutch family managed to accomplish what should have been accomplished a long time ago: production of organic food in Macedonia. Their results were evident. Such a successful combination however demanded personal sacrifices, the first being giving up

starting a family, at least for two to three years until the production and profit was stabilized. Raising a family was postponed for those reasons and both families agreed with this decision.

In that period, Nikola began to go to Macedonia more often and Matilda had nothing against it. Being in Skopje on many occasions, he secretly renewed his love affair with his former love. But it didn't pass unnoticed by his mother, who was persistent and managed to correct Nikola's indiscretion. Matilda used to go to Macedonia once a year. She would go to Skopje first and then she would go to Ohrid where she soaked up the Macedonian sun and clean water of Lake Ohrid.

One summer Matilda and Nikola went to Macedonia together with Matilda's friend Maria. She was a beautiful blonde, slender and attractive Dutch woman. They all went to Ohrid where they found accommodation at one of the hotels on the beach of Lake Ohrid. Everything was good and normal in their behaviour until the day when Maria had to go to Skopje and meet some friends who were arriving in Macedonia.

They arranged for Nikola to drive Matilda and Maria to Skopje and then return to Ohrid a day later with only Maria. And so he did but on the way back to Ohrid, Maria forced Nikola to have sex with her. Nikola couldn't resist Maria's beauty and sexual attractiveness. They continued their love séances in Skopje but his mother found out about them. Her motherly instincts started working. In order to cover up for her son, she skillfully interfered in their love affair and asked Nikola to take her to Ohrid too. So he took her to Ohrid where they stayed for several days, which was enough time for her to cover any trace of

her son's loss of self-control. She succeeded in doing that and Matilda didn't notice anything suspicious. On the contrary, she was happy that Nikola's mother was with them.

Maria returned to the Netherlands, while Matilda and Nikola continued their stay in Skopje. Nikola got a lesson from his mother who, as Nikola said, proved herself a real Macedonian mother. Later Nikola promised his mother that he would quit having love affairs outside his marriage and that he would be faithful to Matilda and, at the same time, remain morally upright, good and deserving of respect as a family man.

What is happening today with Nikola and Matilda? Three years after the completion of the project, they had a son. They had been for a long visit to Amsterdam, with his granddad and grandma. Their company is led by highly skilled professional staff and they have nothing to worry about.

In that way Nikola, who had a restless spirit, got a lesson in life. "I finally became wiser and realized that our life and our future depended only on us," said Nikola bringing his story to an end.

11. RED ROSES

During one period of my life, Canada was my second fatherland. A great number of Macedonians live in Toronto, Ontario, as well as in other cities where they are actively involved in the economic, cultural and scientific life of this multiethnic country in North-America. Consequently, from all my friends scattered on different continents, the most numerous are the Macedonians living in Canada. Therefore, I have dedicated the largest space of my research to them. One of them is Alexander P., a known lawyer from Toronto, affirmed not only among the Macedonians, but also among other nationalities who live in this country. Although I often stayed in Canada and made efforts to see as many of my friends as possible, the last meeting with Alexander was the most impressive and one that cannot be forgotten. The reasons why I have singled out his story are probably because of the dynamics of his professional engagements and therefore my friendship with him was not only interesting, but also exciting.

We were sitting in well-known restaurant in downtown Toronto and having a several-hour marathon conversation on various topics when Alexander singled

out an event which deserves our attention. It refers to his meeting, over the telephone, with “the voice” of a woman whom he phoned in order to ask for a piece of information about one of his clients – a Macedonian who was divorcing his wife. He had never heard such a voice on the other side of a telephone line before, although he had contacts with many people through work in his profession. The voice of that woman was so exciting and romantic that he could hardly resist the urge to suggest a date.

The unknown woman thought he was pressuring her for a date and found it an uncivilized gesture and therefore she hung up the telephone on him. But Alexander wouldn’t have been a good lawyer if he wasn’t persistent. After some time, he phoned her again and after the constant ringing she picked up the receiver and warned the unknown caller about his uncivilized manner of behaviour. In order to meet her request, he immediately presented himself telling her who he was and what he was working on, believing that he would make a more favourable impression on her. It is understandable that he didn’t tell her why he wanted to have a meeting with her. If he had told her that the motive was her voice, it could have irritated her even more and most probably he would have lost any chance of a connection with her. He told her that he was not married, that was born in Canada and had graduated from the School of Law in Toronto and that he had been a lawyer for five years.

The woman answered that they were colleagues, by vocation, and accepted the invitation to meet that very evening at one of the most famous restaurants in the

centre of Toronto. As a way of recognizing each other she suggested that he bring a bouquet of red roses.

Alexander was happy to have won the first round and started to prepare for his rendezvous that night with the woman whose voice made him tremble with excitement. He told no one of his plans. Despite having had many affairs with members of the opposite sex, Alexander was nervous. Meeting with this woman was like taking the most important exam of his life.

At 8 o'clock that evening Alexander was at the restaurant, but somehow hidden to a certain extent behind one of the large pillars so that he was able to see the strange and unknown woman first and then approach her. Casting his eyes around the hall, which was already full of guests, he saw her sitting at one of the tables – the beauty with dark sunglasses – whose eyes were fixed on a spot in the corner. Stunned by what he saw, he couldn't believe his eyes: her posture was typical of the blind. Was it possible that she was a blind woman? How did she manage to get to this restaurant? Countless thoughts crossed his mind. What to do? How to proceed? The woman was sitting with her back to him, "staring" at the large mirror opposite her.

Convinced that she didn't notice him, he decided to leave the restaurant discreetly, putting the bouquet of roses on an empty table.

Although he was excited by this event, he had to prepare for the lawsuit scheduled for the following day. He was pursuing the divorce of a Canadian Macedonian man from his wife. This Macedonian believed that he would win the case because the material evidence was to his

advantage. Interesting but Alexander didn't know who the lawyer was representing the wife of his client, with whom he had two underage children. Since she was an English woman, Alexander supposed that her lawyer was also an Englishman. But this fact meant nothing to him because the evidence was to his client's advantage.

The next morning he set off to the preliminary court hearing related to this case but when he arrived in front of the court building, Alexander couldn't believe his eyes. He met his client in the company of his wife and her lawyer. You could never guess who that lawyer was – the woman whose voice swept Alexander off his feet! The same blind lawyer who was waiting in vain for him at the restaurant! This time, however, the difference was in the black eyeglasses – she wasn't wearing them now! Faced with this fact and the shock he felt, Alexander also faced the nightmare from which he couldn't escape. In the court-room and before the judge, he acted as if absentminded and as a result his client lost the case. The court took the wife's side making her ex-husband pay a high alimony, while she was to keep the children and the house in which she lived. In that way, Alexander lost an apparently easy lawsuit as if he was a novice lawyer.

However his female colleague – the blind lawyer – was the greatest temptation he had experienced during this scuffle and she was not blind at all! She made herself appear as a blind woman at the restaurant and she did it on purpose. Why did she do that? The answer to this question remains unknown to him. Only the woman who had an exciting voice knew how and why she had beat him; not only during their telephone conversations but

also in court. But how was it possible? How did she manage to do this? Alexander could only find the answer with her. Only she could solve this riddle which literally derailed him even though he had a reputation of being one of the leading lawyers there. That is why he began to dial her number again to make an appointment with her and find out the answers he was eager to obtain: whether she had seen him at the restaurant holding a bouquet of red roses in his hands and how she had managed to destroy his arguments for the divorce of his client?

All his attempts to phone her failed. She wouldn't answer. But he didn't give up the idea of meeting with her. The following day he went to her office like any other client asking for help from an experienced lawyer. First he found out her name – Sandra, which was written on the company sign above the entry door; second, she was not blind as he thought when he first saw her at the restaurant; third, why did he lose the lawsuit while defending his client in court the day before; fourth, why did she turn her back on him and throw him away like a dishrag when she probably knew that he was one of the most renowned lawyers in Toronto, just like she was? He suffered his greatest anxiety of love in court. Not only was her voice exciting but also she was very attractive, a rare find in that area. For the first time in his life he realized that he had irresponsibly gambled away his greatest chance in life – to marry her and transform their law offices into a partnership which could make a huge profit.

At his first and only meeting with Sandra, her answer was that he, being a conceited and proud lawyer, had played the wrong card. He was not ready for married

life and the sacrifices that would need to be made for the sake of marriage. He demonstrated all this when he came to the restaurant with a bouquet of red roses in his hands but abandoned them when he saw her wearing “black” eyeglasses, thinking that she was blind. A typical Macedonian man! – he told me at the end of his story. Disgraceful! Absolutely disgraceful!

12. A MARRIAGE TRAP

My old friend from Kavadarci, who has been living for more that ten years in the USA, told me this story. During my official visits to the USA and Canada I was his guest on various occasions. I used to attend the consecrations of the newly built cathedrals of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. However, this time I met Jovan in Kavadarci purely by chance. First we were together at the municipal assembly and after that we went to a restaurant where he told me his story, worth remembering. Many Macedonians usually go through such experiences when they are young and also when they become mature, regardless of whether they are in their homeland, in Europe, Canada, the USA, or in Australia.

Ten years have passed since my last meeting with Jovan in the USA, so this unplanned meeting in our homeland was an occasion and inspiration for a flashback to his past and to evoke the most exciting experiences of his life. He would never forget what happened to him six years before, during his short stay in Kavadarci, when his neighbour invited him into his house for a cup of coffee. Such meetings and relaxed conversations between neighbours in Macedonia are most enjoyable for our

migrant workers who have been living abroad for many years feeling nostalgia for their fatherland.

No sooner had he reached the doorstep of the neighbour's house than Jovan's eyes met the magically beautiful girl who emerged from nowhere to welcome him inside, in broken Macedonian. While they were entering the sitting room, Jovan's neighbour said to Jovan, "This is our niece Eli, born in New York, who has come to visit us." Soon coffee was served by the neighbour's wife and their guest. After Jovan was received gladly and generously, the topic of their conversation began to move to a most unexpected topic. This was related to the marriage of this girl who, although she was born abroad, came to her fatherland to find herself a perfect match, a husband to build a nest with for their future family. So Jovan and Eli became the focal point of attention for both the hosts and themselves. Jovan quickly realized that "the invitation for coffee with his neighbours" was not accidental. Its scenario was developed beforehand so that he and their guest could play the starring roles. They not only became fond of each other on that occasion, but also began dating and enjoying each other's company.

From that moment onwards, the preparations began to "shoot a marriage movie" directed by Jovan's neighbour and his wife Rada, who simply couldn't hide their satisfaction with the success of their plan. Jovan and Eli were together every single day. They were living together at his house and they were also enjoying going to restaurants in Kavadarci and Negotino, and later also in Solun where they used to go shopping each Saturday. Eli's parents who were living in the USA were more than

happy that her daughter had made her life choice and therefore they began preparing for a lavish wedding in New York because their only daughter deserved it.

"Everything was okay by then," Jovan told me. Entranced by this unusual meeting and by the beautiful girl, he seemed to forget that he had come to Macedonia from the USA to make arrangements for his own wedding with his future wife Verče from Veles, with whom he already had a three year relationship. But there he was – caught in a marriage trap and as if unaware of what was happening to him. However, he had to regain his reason quickly. Otherwise malicious talk and scandal would start. Contemplating his embarrassing situation, Jovan made up his mind to act according to a judgment of Solomon: to postpone the wedding with Verče making excuses for such a delay and go to the USA with Eli. He was like a child choosing the better of two toys. In this case, Eli was Jovan's better option which he embraced.

It was hard for Verče from Veles to swallow the reasons for the postponement of her marriage with Jovan, but nevertheless she bowed to his pressure when he convinced her that the reasons were related to his family and that he was going to settle that issue in the USA in a relatively short time. One day in September Jovan and Eli flew to the USA. Their reception at the airport, arranged by Eli's mother, was spectacular.

It didn't take long however for the whole situation to take an ugly turn. The young couple lived with Eli's parents and soon felt their influence on their marriage. The marriage arrangements were planned by his mother-in-law, not by the newlyweds. Life in this home soon

showed its negative side. The reactions of Jovan, expressed in the presence of Eli, had no effect whatsoever on the selfish decisions made by her mother. Soon after the wedding, they reached a crisis in their married life. The solution was to be found in their decision: either to accept her mother's interference in their marriage or move to another apartment. Eli reacted strongly to Jovan's proposal. This was when he realized that Eli was dependent on her mother and was not ready to separate from her parents. He finally opened his eyes and started to look for a solution. It didn't take him long to find it.

One day, under the pretext of taking a walk in New York, he boarded the first plane for Skopje. He went to Veles on the first train to see her beloved Verče and told her that he had finally solved his family problems in the USA, which were the reason for the postponement of their wedding.

"What about the documents from the marriage registry?" I asked him. "Aren't they going to be the main obstacle for your marriage with Verče?"

"No they won't because they never existed. The marriage ceremony and wedding with Eli was not legal. A friend of mine provided me with a document with a seal on it but that, in essence, didn't have any legal validity. Therefore I destroyed that document while I was still in the USA and there is not a single trace of it. Her parents, however, were assured that that document was to be translated into English and certified by the marriage

registry office. But, as you can see, it was not the case," said Jovan.

"My married life with Verče is entering its third year and was strengthened by the birth of our daughter Mirjana!" said Jovan.

"The Americans caused you problems, didn't they?" I asked him.

"There were attempts from their side. The first time they tried to persuade me, in a nice way, to return to their daughter and keep on living together. They even offered to pay my plane ticket and rent an apartment where we could live apart from them. The second time they threatened me with court proceedings, but when they realized that it didn't bother me at all, they gave up. Maybe they hoped that I would return to the USA as a migrant worker and that I would continue living with their daughter. But when I came back to Macedonia, I started a new life, not as a migrant worker, but as a citizen of my own country; my homeland.

"Has Verče ever heard anything about your marriage in the USA?" I asked him.

"No, my present wife has never found out anything about it; perhaps because she has never had any reason to be suspicious. Yet if you ask me about the difference between that and this marriage – it is in the money. Eli's parents in the USA were rich by comparison to Verče's parents here in Macedonia. But, as you can see, love is stronger than money.

13. THE MAGIC OF THE VIRUS

The world of love is boundless and unpredictable. It is filled with surprises and excitement that could have sometimes tragic results. There is no more attractive or powerful force than the magnetism of emotions. A man falls into such a trap spontaneously, unintentionally and unplanned, most often guided by feelings of attraction, happiness and pleasure that, as a raging torrent, seizes life and takes it to the ocean of pleasure. That is why the beginnings of such stories are nice, romantic and blissful but their end is uncertain and unpredictable. Filled with surprises, turmoil, blows and stress, these love stories could end ingloriously and with much trauma if they are subdued by the rivals in the love game or in life itself.

Such is the story of my friend Risto K., who lives in Scarborough. We spent the best years of our childhood and youth together in our fatherland, in Macedonia, which is famous not only for its numerous emigrant communities abroad, but also for the outbreak of rebellions of its people who have been persecuted and not recognized by various conquerors determined to destroy their Macedonian roots. But, their errors, their fruitless efforts have always ended without success because they have forgotten that the strength of our survival stems from the

power of the descendants of Alexander of Macedon who is indestructible.

It is not by pure chance that almost all countries on each continent are open to the Macedonians. Their presence everywhere on Earth is welcomed because of the beauty and love, talent and determination they carry with them from their homeland also enriches those countries and their people, providing them with a specific extract of an ancient biblical civilization whose name is Macedonia.

I would like to tell you about Risto's love story experienced in Canada during the celebration of the tenth anniversary of his happy marriage with Magda and of their daughter Radmila.

Leaving his office, but not forgetting the presents he had bought for his dearest and closest, Risto set off for his home on the outskirts of the city. While he was driving his car through a traffic jam, vivid pictures of life spent with his beloved ones began passing through his mind. He met Magda in Canada, where she had finished her secondary school education. Their love was born during their first meeting at a cultural and artistic performance. The flames of their love were so passionate that they married soon after. Three years later their daughter was born.

While he was waiting for a traffic light at a busy intersection, a beautiful young woman, holding a baby in her arms, approached Risto, asking him for money for her ill child. He didn't have enough time to search and count the money he wanted to give her and, being in a hurry, he carelessly gave her two business cards – one his own

and one of his friend who was a pediatrician. So instead of money she got the addresses and telephone numbers of two successful men. The woman realized that she had gotten much more than some spare change. Satisfied, the mother of “the ill child” returned home and told her husband about the man at the intersection. At first he was disappointed because she returned home without money. He forced her to prostitute herself and, in cases like this when she had no money, he used to beat her. This time, however, her story about the business cards aroused his interest and he didn’t assault her.

He told his wife to phone Risto’s wife while he was at work and tell her that she had known Risto for a long time, had an illegitimate child with him and that he was neglecting his obligation to take good care of the child. She was to especially stress that he hadn’t sent any money in recent months which was causing the child’s health to deteriorate.

Meanwhile, at the same time as these people were planning the deceit which was their livelihood, Risto told his wife everything that had happened with the woman and her baby at the intersection.

After Magda listened to the story she said to her husband “someone is playing a joke on you, but you shouldn’t pay any attention to it”. “If she causes any trouble we will take her to court,” said Risto and that was the end of it at least that is how the short dialogue ended between the spouses who didn’t have time to waste on unimportant matters on the eve of their anniversary. They celebrated at one of the best restaurants, this time in the company of many of their friends. The following day

however, Risto and Magda got an unexpected shock. Near noon the phone rang. On the other end of the line was the voice of the woman from the intersection.

The strange woman told Magda the story which her husband had prepared as an alibi for the blackmail they hoped to extract. Magda managed to remain cool and told her that they would help the sick child through their friend the pediatrician, unless this story had another motive, and then hung up the receiver, ending their telephone conversation.

When Magda told Risto about this telephone conversation with the unknown woman, she calmly suggested that they should help the poor and unhappy mother through their friend first and, if necessary, give her some financial assistance.

"No! It is out of the question!" Risto shouted. "The best answer would be a medical examination and comparison of my DNA to the DNA of the child and that woman, and to appear in court after that. It is the only way to free ourselves of such fakes. Otherwise they will make our lives miserable!"

Magda was not happy with this suggestion and stubbornly told him not to pay too much attention to this incident.

"It is a waste of time. Such affairs happen to people almost every day and if you allow yourself to be tricked, then our marriage could be destroyed," answered Magda, revolted by his determination to undergo a medical examination.

But Risto was poisoned by the incident and was preoccupied with bad thoughts. He was afraid that his wife would be unhappy if she suspected that he had been unfaithful and not loyal to her. He didn't want her thinking that he had an illegitimate child for whom he wouldn't provide. What kind of a father would he be if he didn't have the basic feelings of a parent?

Their quarrel about this incident was interrupted and they didn't talk about it for several days. But Risto didn't sit idly. He found the unknown woman-tormentor and, together with her child, went to see a doctor. Strangely she didn't resist his action. Maybe she hoped that she would be lucky to earn even more money. But not everything goes according to plan! The medical tests proved that Risto was unable to father any child.

His wife Magda knew this but had never admitted that she knew the truth. Her love for Risto had served its purpose. He realized this as he thought about it on his way home from the doctor. Although he was shocked, he came home and remained silent about it about the fact that he was not the biological father of their daughter. He did not say anything to Magda about having taken the medical test.

Their daughter is happily married now and the grandchildren she has given to Risto and Magda fill their life with joy and happiness.

14. A STROKE OF FAITH

The best example that life writes its own novels is the story of Ivan K., our fellow countryman from Melbourne, whom I met during my stay in Australia while examining the phenomenon of migrant workers. At our last meeting we sat in a restaurant, owned by a Macedonian living in that city, and on that occasion Ivan told me about the following event when he managed to escape imprisonment by the skin of his teeth. What happened to him was probably a stroke of luck, not only for him but also for the woman with whom he lived.

Ivan left for Australia with his young wife, whose beauty was rare in Bitola, ten years before we met. He saw beautiful Biljana at a disco in Bitola and was so charmed by her good looks that he decided to marry her at all cost. It was not easy for him, but when she learned that Ivan was preparing to move to Australia, she decided to join him. They soon were married and the newlyweds started packing their suitcases.

On the day they left they were seen off at the railway station by many people including their parents, but most numerous were the boys from her neighbourhood. All of them were in love with Biljana, which was yet another confirmation of her charm and loveliness. It was

obvious that Ivan was the only one who was lucky to have her, although he came from another neighbourhood in Bitola.

But no one could escape their fate. They were welcomed in Melbourne by Ivan's friend who helped them rent a flat and soon he found Ivan a job as an auto mechanic and the young couple started a new chapter of their journey in this faraway country. Biljana wasn't eager to find a job during the first several years because Ivan was earning a lot. Also they wanted to start a family. This wasn't easy and year by year they were running out of patience. In order to lessen this uncertainty Biljana started to look for a way to get pregnant faster and she found it with one of their neighbours; a Macedonian who didn't hide his interest in her. So his platonic love became a reality after some time, and Biljana and Petar melted into each other's embrace. Their meetings were planned with caution and care but it didn't go unnoticed by sharp-eyed Ivan, who had already devised a plan to catch his beautiful wife and her lover.

By this stage in our conversation we had already had four glasses of his strong brandy. He was in a stupor as he spoke about his methods and strategy to catch his wife in the act. One morning when his plan was complete he told his wife that he had to go to a company in a neighbouring town to repair several cars and that he would stay there for two days. Biljana listened to him very attentively and even pretended to be upset at being left alone. But she didn't insist that he postpone his trip. They agreed that Ivan would phone her twice a day at least, so that she would be calm and have sweet dreams.

The leading role in the second part of Ivan's plan was given to his friend Trajan, whom Biljana didn't know. He was supposed to watch their house and see whether a man came in and how long he stayed. Trajan took his camera to provide the necessary proof just in case. Then the plan was put into practice. Trajan had a theory that what was happening to his friend was a result of his great jealousy towards his beautiful wife, who openly attracted the attention of other men.

No sooner had Ivan left on his "business trip" than Petar moved into his home where he not only drank the first coffee, but also "drank" the first passionate embrace with Biljana. So Ivan's suspicion that his wife was unfaithful was confirmed. When Ivan got the call from Trajan, telling him that "there was a guest in his house", he immediately left the hotel where he was staying, took a taxi and met Trajan at this very restaurant where we were also sitting. Ivan hatched a plot with Trajan against Biljana and Petar, omitting the following episode which he experienced while he drove in the taxi.

There was a nice young woman in the taxi who asked the driver to let the new customer in, although such a practice was not usual. Ivan also asked the driver to take him because he was in a terrible hurry. The young woman, obviously in a good mood, also had a reason for letting him in. Showing him the documents she was holding in her hands, she didn't hesitate to tell him that she had just heard good news. After five years of waiting she was finally pregnant and was going to be a mother. The medical examinations she had undergone just a few

hours earlier confirmed that news. Her documents were written proof.

Expressing his congratulations to her about this good news, Ivan also tried to explain his “uncivilized” behaviour for wanting to get into the taxi. He also told her that that day was the unhappiest day of his life because the woman he loved with all his heart was unfaithful and that she was with another man, while they were driving in the taxi.

Shocked by such news the future mother gently caressed his hair, asking him to calm down and relax in order to try to control his actions. “Take the poison out of you. Life is worth living,” the woman told him, persuading him not to make any rash moves, which could destroy his young life.

At the next intersection Ivan got out of the taxi, expressing his thanks to the unknown woman for her understanding. Soon he was home in his bedroom where he was dumbstruck by what he saw, leaving him breathless. He drew out his revolver and pointed it at his wife and her lover. God only knows what thoughts went through his head at that moment. Fortunately, however, no part of that scene was as powerful as his encounter with the young woman in the taxi and her words that there was nothing in the world more valuable than life itself. Everything could be replaced and substituted, but life couldn’t. We live only once and therefore we have to preserve life.

His hand with the revolver kept hanging in the air because at that moment Ivan decided to choose to protect and preserve his own life, not to destroy the life of his

unfaithful wife. He left the house and headed to the hotel by taxi, where he had waited for Trajan's call some time ago. The driver stopped at an intersection because the traffic light was red. Next to him, another taxi stopped and he saw the happy pregnant woman who had saved his life that day. He opened the door of his taxi and catapulted himself into her taxi, not forgetting to pay his driver generously.

The second encounter with the future mother was an exciting experience for Ivan! She told him that her happiness had been replaced by unhappiness because she had just seen her husband with another woman. Consequently, she had decided to kill herself and was heading to the sea to drown herself and end her misery.

What Ivan saw in this woman was his destiny. He stopped the taxi by the sea and together they got out. He embraced her affectionately, reminding her of her own words that, "life is worth living". Holding hands they kept on walking by the sea.

No one can escape their destiny. Ivan and Roza went to a hotel and after some time rented an apartment where they have spent the rest of their lives as a happy family.

15. TO THE RHYTHM OF SIRTAKI

The greatest and oldest immigrant grouping on the North Atlantic continent, and especially in Canada, are the Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia, whose exodus started in the beginning of the previous century, reaching its climax during the Greek Civil War when the Macedonians received the most severe blow. Jonče (Jorgo) from Voden was among the refugees from all over the world. Quite accidentally, instead of being in the group of child refugees who were mainly sent to Eastern Europe and Russia, he was placed in a small group of refugees who happened to have relatives in the USA and Canada.

After twenty years of Macedonians emigrating from Aegean Macedonia, I met Jonče during one of my visits to Toronto during a church ceremony. I didn't know that it was Jonče, but our friendly, not to say brotherly conversation, revealed who he was as well as the secret of his existence in this world following 1948 when the fascist monarchy caused devastation in the most beautiful part of my homeland.

I used to meet him and his family during my visits to Canada in the past. He was finishing his studies in communications, still unmarried and was always at my disposal for walks in this beautiful country. The number of

Macedonian immigrants in Canada was constantly rising regardless of the situation in their fatherland which now, especially in the new democratic conditions, couldn't keep pace with the dynamic development of Europe.

During my visit to Canada, Jonče revealed his wish to me. He wanted his son Alexander to continue his university education at the European University for Strategic Marketing in Solun, after finishing his college education in Toronto.

It wasn't long before I was pleasantly surprised. One evening I heard a well-known voice from Solun. It couldn't be anyone else but the son of my friend Jonče! Since I knew Jonče's wish, I expected that he was there to continue his education. Alexander was a man with a strong personality, resolute in making decisions and efficient in their realization. We agreed that he would come to Skopje on his first available weekend.

Ten days later he arrived. When he got off the international train at the Skopje railway station I hardly recognized him. He was slim and elegant. Although we had only a few days to visit, we had enough time for the discussion of many topics, among them his love life.

We met several times and on this occasion I took him to dinner at the Holiday Inn along the river Vardar. We were in the mood to talk unconventionally, about everything, and reached the topic of getting married, which is sacred to each Macedonian. I told him that he should pay close attention to this issue if he wanted to have a successful and happy family. Getting married and starting a family is of utmost importance if, it is

understood, the roots and offspring from the times of our ancestors were to be preserved.

Although he had already been in Solun for more than six months, he delayed coming to Skopje for several reasons. First he had to secure himself at the college, to familiarize himself with the structure of the studies and then have an outlet for his emotional life, i.e. for relaxation. These reasons were acceptable to us, but the real reason for his arrival in Skopje after such a long time was in fact of a different nature. Namely, the girl he met and got to know during the first month of his arrival in Solun was also living in the dormitory where he was staying. She came from the inland area of Greece, somewhere from the Peloponnesus. Her grace was outstanding. The wonderful features of her face, typical for beautiful Greek women, as well as her gracefulness charmed him and unsettled him. When they got to know each other he presented himself, in the Greek language, saying that he was born in Toronto. Aphrodite was also charmed by his good-looking appearance, similar to that of Apollo. But it took him a long time to win her heart completely.

After a pleasant stay in Skopje, Alexander returned to Solun. According to our agreement, however, the next summer we were to visit him and spend our summer holiday with him and his girlfriend at a resort in Halkidiki. After he left, there were still many questions that remained unanswered. One of the most important was the question, how would Aphrodite react when she learned that he was a Macedonian born in Canada, but from Voden by origin? Was marriage with this pretty Greek girl

a reality or simply fiction? When was he planning to tell her so that they would have a chance to assess if their marriage would work out? Had he informed his parents about his plans and what were their reactions?

It didn't take us long to get the answers to all these questions and dilemmas. Their reply arrived in May the following year! Alexander phoned us from Solun to inform us that he accepted the idea, that we had suggested when he was our guest, of spending our summer holiday with him and Aphrodite in Halkidiki. After that we were to be his witnesses at the marriage ceremonies which they planned for the autumn to take place in three countries: first in Athens, then in Toronto and finally in Skopje. In that way they would complete the circle of a sincere Greek-Macedonian friendship, of an impulsive love affair typical for the Balkans.

Alexander finished his doctorate at the College for Strategic Marketing which was yet another reason for a joint holiday and for their wedding. On June 25th my wife, Nada, and I arrived in Solun where we were warmly and cordially welcomed by our friends Alexander and Aphrodite. We traveled to Hanioti, a lovely resort in Halkidiki, by car. We booked our reservation until the end of July. It was our first meeting with this Macedonian daughter-in-law with whom we communicated in English. She was from Peloponnesus by origin, but lived in Athens with her brother. She grew up in a family of pharmacists who had two pharmacies which provided them a comfortable life. Aphrodite finished high school and graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy in Athens and then went to the University of Sheffield in Britain for her

postgraduate studies in the field of educational and scientific-research. This university has a department in Solun where she met Alexander.

After that summer holiday, in October, Alexander and Aphrodite got married in Athens. At their wedding ceremony we were at the centre of attention not only as their witnesses but also as Macedonians from Skopje. The hosts didn't hide the fact that they were honoured and happy by our presence, a fact to be revealed not only in Greece, but also in Canada and America, as well as in Australia and Europe. It is a small world, isn't it! Europe is expecting the offspring of these newlyweds from the Balkans to remove the borders among peoples, rewarding them with happiness and well-being.

The best proof for this was the rhythm of the sirtaki which dictated the pace of the wedding ceremony between Alexander and Aphrodite in Athens.

16. A WRONG CHOICE

My encounter with Krste S. in Detroit was quite casual. He had noticed my presence at a religious celebration in this city in the USA where a large number of Macedonians live. As vice-president of the National Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, I used to attend many important celebrations among Macedonians in the Diaspora in that period. Such events were good opportunities for me to monitor the life of the Macedonian emigrants, on almost all continents, and also to meet my friends and acquaintances who had moved from our motherland and with whom I had lost track. This refers to former citizens of Prespa, friends from my childhood and teenage years.

The encounter with my schoolmate Krste S. was unexpected, but it was exciting. I didn't recognize him, but luckily he recognized me among that large crowd of people gathered to attend the consecration of the church. From that moment onwards, I was in his company during my stay in Detroit, refreshing our memories from our childhood and youth. He introduced me to his wife Dragica and their two children – their son Alexander and daughter Milica, who were aged 16 and 20 respectively. His successful business enabled him to be secure

economically so that his wife could completely dedicate her time to raising their children. In addition, his participation in the activities of the church community, as well as his involvement with the Macedonian newspapers made him popular among our migrant workers in Detroit.

But, his life hadn't always been as smooth as it seemed at first sight. His first problem was an unhappy relationship with an American girl named Mary. Soon after his arrival in America he met her and fell head over heels in love. He couldn't imagine a day without her. His lack of sexual experience had done it. The American girl was dazzled by his good looks but mainly by his manliness, typical of Macedonians. Fortunately his love affair with Mary lasted for a relatively short time so he didn't have time to rush into marrying her. Being a child of divorced parents and raised by her aunt, she made efforts to become independent as soon as possible so that she could finally start living by her own decisions. But it was impossible for her to completely hide her freedom-loving habits learned during her childhood and formative years, no matter what she did. Krste was raised in a patriarchal setting in which order and rank status reigned in the ethnic sense of the word.

Her pressure on him to marry her was getting stronger and stronger day by day. But it had an adverse effect on him – he became more and more estranged from her. As a result, he reduced the numbers of dates with her, inventing excuses that he had to travel for business more often. After some time he became cold towards Mary and they broke off. Krste experienced this loss like an achievement, a significant learning experience

in his life. It didn't affect his intention to get married and start a family. His close relatives in Detroit, who helped him come to this beautiful country, gave him their support in this situation. Their position was categorical: he should look for his soul mate in Macedonia; the engagement would take place in Resen and the wedding in Detroit.

This plan was realized a year later. During his stay in Macedonia he met a former schoolmate, Dragica, who didn't recognize him, at the market in Prespa. She was his favourite female friend in high school, but nothing more and therefore she remained in his mind as an innocent memory from his youth. This encounter with her at the marketplace that day reawakened his repressed feelings. He saw his soul mate in her. A month later, on Ilinden, they got married. This marriage ceremony, welcomed by all his relatives and friends, was solemnly celebrated. Its pinnacle was the wedding ceremony in Detroit.

However, another event took place a year before Krste and Dragica were married. When he arrived in his fatherland, he took a bus from Skopje to Resen and on that occasion he got to know the girl who was sitting next to him, named Frosina. She was from Ohrid and was returning from Skopje where she was enrolled in the Faculty of Philosophy. Their conversation was so pleasant and brought them close, so Krste decided to spend that day in Ohrid with Frosina. She showed him the cultural and historic monuments of Ohrid, took him along the promenade and he took her to a lavish lunch at St. Naum which strengthened both their friendship and love relationship. They spent the evening in a tavern and went

to their homes late that night. She returned to her parents while he left for Resen.

Krste didn't return to Ohrid or try to get in touch with Frosina, not even by phone. After his engagement with Dragica they went to Detroit. Their marriage was harmonious, enriched by their children who were the fruits of their love.

This harmony, however, was disturbed a year later when Frosina sent him a message that she had gotten pregnant by him and was expecting him to take her to America. This message was sent through a friend of hers – a migrant worker in Detroit who happened to know Krste.

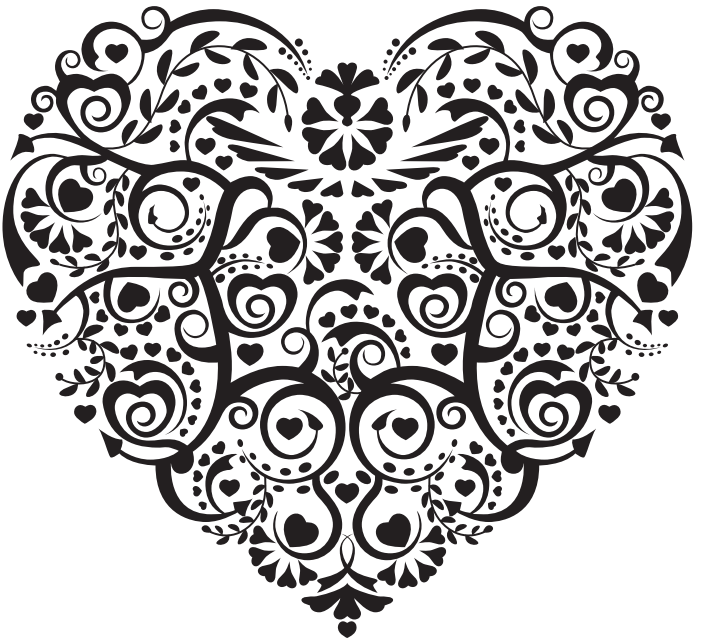
At that time, Frosina didn't know that Krste had gotten married. She learned about this from her friend. Shocked by this she sent him another message. If he wouldn't take her then he was to send money for the baby as she intended to give birth. If not, she would tell his wife all about this and that would probably break up his marriage. He agreed to comply with her demands and immediately sent her money as part of his financial obligation – through Ohridska Banka where a friend of hers was working.

Five years later, Krste was weighed down with new worries, although Dragica had never learned about his affair with Frosina. In addition to his legitimate children, he had an illegitimate son in Ohrid who was named after him – Krste. He was tormented by various feelings, such as what his son looked like, whether he resembled him etc. The five-year old son also wanted to know his father, where he was and what he looked like. The very thought

of his son made Krste sick emotionally. The burden was so great that he made plans to go to Macedonia and see his son, who was conceived in Sveti Naum. He resorted to a secret tactic to go to his fatherland alone, without Dragica.

Krste wanted to surprise Frosina with his visit to Ohrid. Therefore he didn't inform her of his arrival, in order to visit her and see his son. In addition he planned to acknowledge his paternity. Besides that he wanted to have a serious talk with Frosina about whether he should increase his financial assistance for his son because he was growing up and would soon go to school. His plan to go to Macedonia alone was finally realized. One nice day in May he met Frosina and their son at the Ohrid port. Their meeting was very exciting. The three started crying. Krste took his son in his arms and embraced him affectionately, and also his mother who had never dreamt that something like this would ever happen. More than happy, they took a taxi and went to Sveti Naum to celebrate this exceptional event. Everything that Krste planned before his arrival happened. He acknowledged paternity of his son, provided financial support and promised Frosina that he would visit them in Ohrid every second year.

So something good came out of a poor choice.



17. NATALIE HAS RETURNED

Natalie was a girl that all the graduating students of secondary school in Skopje loved, including myself. She was our pride, our hope in those years for our lives, our faith in life itself and our spark. I don't know any other woman who has been bestowed by God with such distinguished characteristics: beauty, virtue, talent and optimism. Her beauty was the most powerful magnet in attracting men and she was our mascot, our source of energy not only for learning but also for solving all the problems that young men had at that age. Natalie appealed to us in our adolescent period, soothing our pain in matters of love. We were proud of her and we were aware that she belonged to us, the graduating pupils of the grade IV. She also nourished this feeling of ours by her behaviour, treating us as if we had been her "love mafia". She took good care of us not only in high school, but elsewhere also.

Natalie's magnetism was increased by something else. In addition to English she spoke many languages and her command of the Arabic language was perfect. It led her to become an official interpreter of the Arabic language for many companies that worked with European companies and also for the Government's need when

necessary. These engagements increased her popularity in public because she was always seen on TV. After we finished our secondary education each of us started to live our lives, some of us continued education in university, some of us got jobs and others looked for a job. But Natalie continued to accompany businesspersons from the European world, strengthening their position in our region by her beauty and charm, which could rarely be seen in their world because of the Moslem women's veil and face covering.

Ten years had passed and there wasn't any trace of her. She disappeared from TV and also from the streets where we used to meet her walking with her friends. But she never disappeared from our memories. She always used to have time for each of us, for her circle of friends, to ask how we were doing, what we were working at, where we were spending our time and whether we had settled down and gotten married. Her absence created a huge gap in our souls. Nevertheless we kept on cherishing her in our hearts and were joyful when we shared our memories of her. Late one night, while I was working on a manuscript, I turned the TV on and saw Natalie talking and singing. She was not in the United Arab Emirates, but here in Skopje, on one of the local TV channels.

Suddenly our Natalie had come back to life as an angel. She was elegantly and fashionably dressed in European clothing, complemented with items of clothing from the Arab world. She had make-up which hid the mystery of her face, making her even more attractive and

beautiful. She was reinvented in a way that we, her schoolmates, were not accustomed. It was that night when I realized that we, the Macedonians, have our treasures, not in money but in the beauty of Macedonian woman, unparalleled in the world. Natalie was unique proof of how the United Arab Emirates could be subdued and put under the direct control of a Macedonian beauty.

Staring at the TV screen with my eyes wide open, I wondered how it was possible that no one knew that Natalie had such a lovely singing voice and that she has been a professional in the musical world. Listening to her song, I realized that in addition to her beauty, her voice had also been her weapon which delighted many sheiks from the Middle East. Being excited by her appearance on TV, I wanted to wake up my wife to see this miracle, to see Natalie, about whom I had told her so much in the past. But I changed my mind when I heard that this show was to be broadcast again in several days. It would give me enough time to relax and watch the show about Natalie and arrange a meeting with her in one of the restaurants in Skopje.

The following day I told my wife about the shock I had the previous night. She was greatly interested in the forthcoming meeting with Natalie but also suggested that we should immediately make plans for this event. At the same time we had a problem; should this meeting be private with only Natalie and us, or should we invite my schoolmates. Finally, however, we decided that it would be a personal meeting because we didn't have any

information about how long Natalie was going to stay in Skopje. She mentioned on the TV show that she had two children who remained in Dubai with her husband and that she had arrived in Skopje alone. She hadn't mentioned how long she would stay.

Since I knew the address of Natalie's family in Skopje, I soon got her on the phone and we made arrangements to get together on the coming Saturday night. She eagerly accepted my invitation.

It was a solemn atmosphere in my home as if we were waiting for "our uncle from America". My son and daughter were very happy that they were to see their "aunt" for the first time. The last thing to do was choose a present for Natalie, as a memento of our meeting in Skopje. After a short and dynamic discussion, my wife suggested that we should buy her an Ohrid pearl to remind her of our meeting and her homeland. Since we had one day at our disposal, we all went to Ohrid to find one.

Our meeting took place at the Gino Restaurant in the Skopje City Shopping Centre. For me, Natalie was even more beautiful now than she had been during our school days. My wife, seeing her for the first time, thought she looked like a real film star. She was a beautiful Macedonian created by God, and rewarded by her sheik on every level, not only by his behaviour towards her as a husband, but also by the money which was at his disposal. Natalie was irrefutable proof that love makes miracles: she had a palace where she and her two

children – a son and daughter – received undivided attention and care, not only by her husband and their father, but also by the numerous servants who maintained the palace. It was a spacious palace of 1200 m2, with 12 bedrooms, 5 living rooms and 12 bathrooms, as well as several tennis courts and billiard rooms, two swimming pools and a heavenly garden needing constant upkeep.

The only obligation Natalie had was to say goodbye to her husband, when he went to work at a complex of hotels and restaurants, and welcome him when he came home, as well as take good care of their children, organize tea parties for the wives of their friends, accompany him on his travels to Europe or America, and to be by his side whenever they had guests from other countries. He didn't have any religious prejudices. He satisfied all her wishes without any discussion. Her arrival in Macedonia was in this context too. She came to Macedonia to arrange business deals for her husband in the area of hotel and tourism. Such cooperation would lead to investment in our country and export of our products to the Emirates, especially of organic food. This meant that Natalie was in Skopje at the request of her husband. After Macedonia became an independent country, he wanted to pay Macedonia back because it had given him his wife Natalie, who was his greatest treasure, and had made him the happiest man in the world. After her return to the Emirates, her husband came to Skopje to make arrangements with the companies that

Natalie had contacted and with whom she had established business relations.

Natalie received the Ohrid pearl as a token and memory of this meeting and also of the forthcoming meetings with all her other friends from her fatherland.

18. THE LOVE CAROUSEL

This love carousel wouldn't be complete if the story of my friend Lazo was not included here. He is from Tirana but he is a Macedonian by origin. I met him during one of my stays in Albania, in times when many foreigners went to this country when it was headed by the dictator Enver Hodza. I met Lazo at the hotel where I was staying. He was born in Pustec. He was a teacher by vocation and a bachelor with a permanent residence in the capital of this neighbouring country.

Although the human rights and freedoms of Macedonians in Albania are progressing slowly, in spite of all efforts by the ruling authorities to have a positive process for their development and improvement, the Macedonians in this country are slowly but surely entering a stage where they can attain such aims. This depends on the two countries which are committed to establishing friendly relations and joining the European Union through their mutual cooperation. All these circumstances and developments have influenced Lazo's position in Albanian society and even his marriage to Melita, an Albanian woman.

From our conversation I learned that Lazo had been recently to Macedonia several times especially to Prespa where his parents live. It is understandable because Pustec, the place where he was born, is located near Lake Prespa. In a relaxed atmosphere he told me his story about Melita, an English teacher in Tirana. Lazo and Melita worked at the same school as teachers. Their relationship was spontaneous, or love at first sight, as it is often called. For Lazo, both the Albanian and English languages were as easy to use as his mother tongue and therefore talking with Melita was easy. Although the religious gap with Muslim women has been especially emphasized in the Balkans, it wasn't important to the Albanians under the reign of Enver Hodza because religion was completely ignored. The mosques were closed and transformed into cultural monuments which weren't used as temples for religious services.

Their love affair lasted for several years until they finally decided to solve the issue of their housing when, at last, they were in a position to start a family. All this time, Lazo hadn't told Melita that he was Macedonian, born in Pustec, and that his parents were still living there. Being aware that he had made a serious mistake, which could have disastrous consequences after they married, Lazo decided to tell her the truth when they were on a picnic one day. He was caressing her curly hair for an hour, complimenting her as the most beautiful woman he had ever met in his life, that no other woman in Albania had

eyes like hers and that her lips were as sweet as mead which she only offered to him.

Surprised by his behaviour, Melita asked him what this was all about and if he was making a fool of her. Stunned and bewildered by her question, Lazo became confused and started to stammer, searching for the best answer. “I, I am Macedonian, I am an orthodox Macedonian, not an Albanian Muslim!” he answered, sweating heavily before his beloved girl. While he was waiting for her reaction, he thought he would have a heart attack. But the surprise he experienced was not caused by her negative reply, but by her smile while she explained to him, “Excellent, you and I therefore belong to the same religion and that is what brings us closer and does not separate us.” At the same time, Melita apologized for not revealing this fact to him earlier.

That was the day they decided to get married and start planning the marriage ceremony. They decided that it was to take place in two locations, both in Tirana and in Pustec. They would go to Macedonia, in Ohrid, for their honeymoon. They planned their marriage for the end of that school year. Lazo informed his parents in Pustec about this giant step in his life and he also sent word to his friends in Macedonia, through his acquaintances from Prespa, who were on business in Tirana. Lazo and Melita started preparations related to furnishing their new home. They went to furniture stores each day to select furniture for their nest. Finally they informed their colleagues from school about their plans and it was understood that all of

them, without exception, would be on the wedding guest list.

Here ends the first exciting and joyful part of Lazo's story and here begins that part of the story that he could never have dreamt. Nearing the end of the school year, the enthusiasm of the future bride started to gradually lessen and diminished to a degree of indifference. It was as if she expected nothing to happen at the end of June or the beginning of July when the wedding was to occur. Lazo began questioning her about it and she used to answer that she wasn't feeling good, she had the flu, or a quarrel at school with some of her colleagues. This situation lasted until the end of June when she told Lazo that she urgently needed to go to Girokastro. She said she needed to see her aunt who was so ill that if she didn't go she might never see her again. Lazo offered to accompany her but she refused on the pretext that her aunt lived alone in a small apartment and that there was not enough room for the three of them.

The following morning Melita left for Girokastro, the southernmost coastal town in Albania – on the Albanian-Greek border.

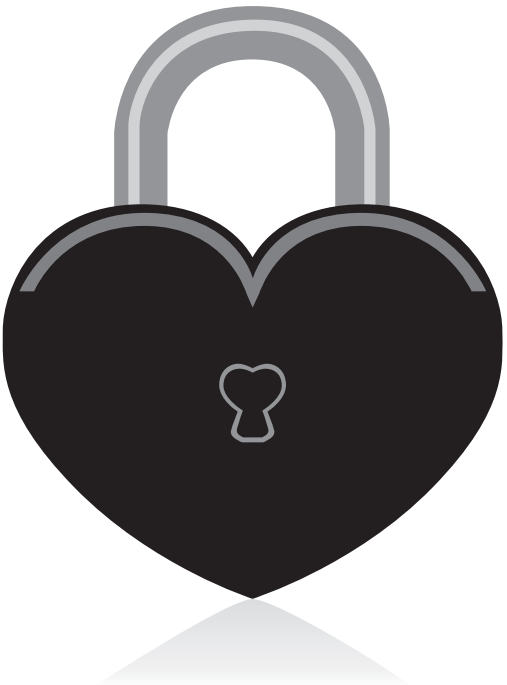
Several days after her departure from Tirana, the school year ended and there was no need for Melita to come back, except to return to Lazo and get married. But there was not a sign of Melita. At first Lazo thought that maybe her aunt had died and she had to stay for the funeral. Or maybe there were health complications and she had to stay to help during her recovery. There were so many assumptions but only God knew what had really

happened in Girokastro. One month later, however, Lazo found out the truth about her disappearance and it was unpleasant.

In fact he had a telephone conversation with an anonymous gentleman whose number he found in Melita's notebook. The man said he was Melita's husband and that they had two children. His wife worked in Girokastro as a teacher but she was on temporary assignment in Tirana until a teaching job in Tirana could be created for her after the retirement of an old teacher. Stunned and bewildered by this information, Lazo restrained himself from saying he was Melita's future husband. He only told the man that he was sorry Melita was absent from the celebration at their school because it was the end of the school year. In that way, he succeeded in saving her marriage and postponing his for another soul mate.

Provoked by this unpleasant news, Lazo decided to spend his summer holiday in Girokastro and see for himself what was happening with Melita. When he arrived there, he found accommodation in a small hotel by the sea and started to search for the woman who had given him the strongest slap in the face. After several days of inquiry, he succeeded in finding out where she lived and got precise information about Melita from her neighbours. She had been married for ten years to a Greek named Stavridis and they had two sons aged 7 and 9. They lived in a comfortable three bedroom apartment, owned by her husband.

Lazo terminated his holiday and left for Pustec.



19. THE VIRGIN STORY

On our way back from the attractive Golden Sands on the Bulgarian port of the Black Sea with a friend of mine, we dropped into a well-known restaurant in Blagoevgrad for refreshments after our long journey by car, before we continued for Skopje.

When we sat at the table, a fellow countryman who was a citizen of Blagoevgrad approached us. After he asked us where we were from and where we were headed, he asked us to let him join us for lunch, acting as our host. He said that his name was Ivan, born thirty years before in Blagoevgrad, to a Macedonian family. At the same time he started to tell us his exciting story, which deserves to be written. As a testimony to Macedonian destiny in the Balkans, Ivan spoke Bulgarian with Macedonian emphasis on some words, which he learned from his parents while he was growing up and developing his personality.

His ties with the old fatherland remained uninterrupted as he used to go to his relatives in Prilep almost every year. This city attracted him like a magnet, not because his parents were born there, but because he

had made friends with many people living there. They had shown him numerous interesting places in Prilep and its vicinity, and even the villages where they were born. So Ivan had gotten Macedonia back into his heart and he planned marry a Macedonian girl from Prilep.

The acquaintance with Elena took place a year before when he was at the birthday of one of his friends in Prilep. He was overwhelmed by the beauty of the Prilep girl. Her blue eyes charmed him so much that he couldn't take his eyes off her. Their relationship developed and strengthened slowly but surely day by day and it reached its final stage – marriage. Elena was a teacher for five years in a primary school and she was the only and favourite daughter of her parents.

One day Ivan and Elena were faced with the inevitable – to inform their parents about their love affair and get their support and eventually their ideas and suggestions for their marriage. Up until that point in time they only had the support of their friends and associates. No one could predict their reaction.

Ivan started to formulate and develop a strategy to win over his parents in Blagoevgrad because they were the first to be informed. Neither Ivan nor Elena could foresee their reaction because his parents were to hear their love story for the first time. He tried to anticipate any problems that might arise and altered his plans somewhat. But with Ivan's quick thinking and spontaneity his parent's reaction was positive.

Ivan's parents said that they would make their decision after they had met not only his future bride, but

also her parents. Ivan returned to Prilep to begin his preparations. Elena's parents agreed to meet Ivan's family together with their daughter. Since blood is thicker than water, they decided to get to know his parents and familiarize themselves with Blagoevgrad and make their decision there. In addition they would decide where the future newlyweds would live – in Prilep or in Blagoevgrad, which was a serious problem.

One day the wedding party from Prilep set off for Blagoevgrad on a noble mission. Elena and her parents, Marija and Slavejko, in their "ford caravan" drove towards the Macedonian-Bulgarian border. Their future son-in-law Ivan was supposed to wait for them there. But to everyone's surprise, Ivan's parents, Blaguna and Stefan, with their "Lada" were also waiting for them. The meeting at the border was cordial and exciting for the two families. Although they met each other for the first time, they felt as if they were one family which, under the force of certain circumstances, had to be separated for some time. Instead of Ivan's house, they turned off the road and headed to this restaurant, where Ivan later told me this story.

The lavish lunch and convivial discussions on various topics had no end. There was no issue from politics or economy which was not fully discussed. The issue about the newlyweds was to be discussed at Ivan's home, where the ambience was pleasant and relaxing and their heads more sober. After their leisure time that afternoon, the guests suggested going to the theatre to see the performance for that night.

After the theatre performance they went to another restaurant – a more luxurious one because a famous music band with a female singer, who attracted the visitors' attention not only by the selection of her songs, but also by her beautiful appearance, had her show there. "The negotiations" for the wedding were left for the last day of Elena's parents stay in Blagoevgrad. Ivan's story went like this:

"It was Sunday after lunch when it was agreed that Elena and I would take a walk in town to visit some exhibitions, while 'the old folks' stayed home to discuss all the essential issues related to our marriage ceremony, and then the issues related to our wedding. After we returned from town, they would announce their decisions and Elena and her parents would return to Prilep the following day."

My friend watched, as his face seemed to experience stress with each spoken word, and advised Ivan to calm down, not to get excited. We thought that he was concerned about some misfortune or action which was outside of his control and that he was now under pressure and felt a need to speak about it.

"On Sunday evening we faced a surprise, which we couldn't even imagine in a dream. It was an unexpected shock! Life could only 'cut out' many unknowns! One of them was the news which our parents told us: Elena and I couldn't get married because we were relatives. Had we been distant relatives, in such a case, this could be ignored, but we were in fact close relatives. In a word, Elena and I were second cousins, because our parents

were part of one family that had scattered to different places in the whirlwind of wars and partitions of Macedonia. Consequently they had lost their connection and family ties. Yet, there are always happy parts in any misfortune. In our misfortune, our mutual sympathy slowly turned into love, more platonic than physical. It meant that in spite of all risks in such cases, my love with Elena was a kind of exaltation for all its virginity," explained Ivan of his and Elena's pain.

The blow to the young lovers by that news changed into a happy event for their parents who re-established their own family relationships through the love of their children. Such a resurrection turned into a celebration that they would mark until the end of their lives.

20. LIFE WRITES ITS OWN NOVELS

It was at the end of May when I went on a five-day business trip to Istanbul, Republic of Turkey, where a great number of my friends lived, who I remembered from when they lived in the Republic of Macedonia. Their move to this friendly country created a huge gap in Macedonia because the Turks were completely integrated in the life of our country. If the fact that they have become famous as the most capable businesspersons in the state of Ataturk is taken into consideration, then our loss is greater because if they had been here, around their ancient hearths, after our country was transformed into a new democracy, then they could have greatly contributed to its economic stabilization.

I met Kemal in Istanbul several years before during one of my first stays in Turkey. He held a high position in the city administration, elected during local elections. A friend of mine, the owner of a publishing house that translates into Turkish, was our connection. After Kemal showed me the monuments of Istanbul, built during the century-long history of Turkey, he took me to his restaurant located on the eastern coast of the isthmus near the suspension bridge connecting Europe with Asia.

The lunch and conversation on this occasion gave me great pleasure, which could only be experienced between good friends. It was confirmed once again that there is no greater treasure than our contacts with people, regardless of where they live and how well we knew them before.

Kemal's story was about the most intimate part of his life and therefore it deserves special attention and respect. It reveals his human greatness which is why it deserves to be told. His story started from the time of the great immigrant wave of Turks from Macedonia when he and his parents, who lived in Radoviš at that time, decided to leave their fatherland with a heavy heart. Kemal would lose his dream and his friend, Nermin, a schoolmate with whom he was in love but whose family didn't plan on moving to Turkey.

As every beginning, their beginning was also hard. Sudden and great changes in living conditions creates great difficulties, starting with acclimatizing to a new environment, creating new habits, making new friends and, most important of all, being successful in business which, depends mainly on one's personal abilities.

Two years later, Kemal finished his secondary education and his parents, who bought a house on the periphery of Istanbul, started to secure their future economically. They opened a fruit and vegetable store, providing funds for Kemal to enroll in the Faculty of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering. He graduated with high grades. He was immediately hired by a company within the Turkish electric power industry – as a manager of a section. He advanced successfully and quickly so that a few years later he owned a company, which supplied this section with spare parts and provided

maintenance of some facilities within power plants. His work had made him a rich businessman. Therefore Kemal didn't have time to begin a family; the Turks of Rumelia often didn't either.

Being under pressure from his parents who were already advanced in years, without grandchildren, Kemal started to think about how to solve this problem. He had many opportunities to get married in Istanbul, but all his efforts failed because family was the last thing on the minds of the women in his circle.

After some time, however, Kemal decided to follow his parent's advice and look for a mate in his former homeland, in Radoviš or nearby, among the Turks-Yuruci who had come to this region in the Middle Ages. They were known as good stockbreeders. They had preserved the Turkish language and were well-known for their devotion to family. This fact was an important criterion for Kemal to make his decision and one day set off for the old continent. During his preparations he didn't mention the name Nermin, with whom he was in love during their school days and who now was around thirty, five years younger than him. She, in fact, was the main reason for him going to Macedonia to find his soul mate. More precisely, he wanted to find her even though he didn't have any information about her present life.

One day, in the beginning of the summer he arrived in Skopje in his Ford. He spent the night with an old friend who would accompany him to Radoviš. He found Nermin's parents very quickly, but he didn't find her. She was in Skopje because her kidneys were malfunctioning. Doctors fought to keep her alive by dialysis for a month because they were waiting for a kidney donor.

Shocked by this news, Kemal returned to Skopje immediately, broken-hearted. He visited Nermin at the hospital that very evening. Except for her pale face, she was still very beautiful. In fact Kemal found her more beautiful than when they were high school students in Radoviš. She told him that kidney donors or donors of other vital organs were found among those killed in accidents or other disasters, if their close relatives agreed to it. Nevertheless Nermin remained hopeful that her life would be saved.

Kemal left the hospital an hour later, promising his beloved that he would stay in Skopje for several days and visit her daily. He asked hospital management to move her to a special room and he covered the expenses himself.

Nermin was moved to another room the next day and found many bouquets of flowers in it. As a token of his appreciation to the management of the hospital for accepting his suggestion, Kemal bought a dialysis machine as a gift to the hospital.

On the tenth day of his stay in Skopje, Kemal made a crucial decision – he would donate a kidney to Nermin. The fact that they had compatible blood types only strengthened his decision. Once she came out of hospital they would go to Istanbul and marry.

This news was wonderful not only for Nermin and her parents, but also for Kemal's parents and his friends! To make that happiness even greater, his parents immediately came to Skopje in order to be with their son and their future daughter-in-law, whom they didn't even

know. They welcomed the decision of their son to take her to be his wife. The magic of the Rumeli vilayet worked indeed. Macedonian men don't give up easily. Family is sacred to them.

The kidney transplant was successful, the expenses were covered and Kemal and his parents stayed at the Holiday Inn until Nermin recovered. By the end of that month, they had not only visited Radoviš, but had met their old friends and gone on holiday to Ohrid for a whole month. Meanwhile Nermin recovered and Kemal provided all documents necessary for the registration of their marriage in Istanbul.

True love doesn't have a price, indeed!

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SLAVÉ KATIN was born in Lower Prespa and was educated in Ljubojno, Skopje, Belgrade, and Toronto. He is well known in the Macedonian and international cultural and scientific communities, especially for the numerous reports he has written and the research he has conducted on the lives of many Macedonians worldwide. His work has also involved other aspects of the Diaspora such as culture, literature, language, journalism, history, science and religion.

Of the forty five books he has written, in his creative opus, the following deserve special mention: *The Macedonians in the USA and Canada* (in Macedonian and English); *The Macedo-nian Orthodox Churches in Australia, Canada and the USA; The Press of the Macedonian Immigrants; Ilinden 1903-2003 and the Macedonian Immigrants,* as well as *The Contribution of Macedonia to the World Civilization, From Panonia to Aegae, In Honor of Saints Cyril and Methodius and The Aureole of the Virgin Mary and the Saint Mary Monastery of Slivnica in Prespa* (in Macedonian), *and Macedonia in Ancient Times*, (in English), as co-author with Academician Antonije Škokljev-Dončo, Prof. Vera Stojčevska-Antić, Ph. D, and Risto Stefov (Chris Stefou).

Slavè Katin has also authored a book about *Atanas Bliznakov* from Gary, Indiana, a great Macedonian donator, as well as the following monographs about: *Andrea Branov* in Melbourne, *The Janovski Family* in Toronto, *Svetle (Steve) Stamevski* in Detroit, *George Tomov* in New York, *Boško Rajčovski-Pelisterski* in Florida, Petar Stamatoff in Chicago, and Metropolitan Kiril (in Macedonian and English).

Slave Katin is also known for his lexicographical works, as well as for the translation of the novel *Alexander the Great (of Macedon)*, by Ulrich Wilken, (from English to Macedonian), and other translations. Slave Katin has received many awards and recognition, the most prestigious of which was the *Krste P. Misirkov Award*, received from the Association of the Macedonian Journalists, in the field of journalism.

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